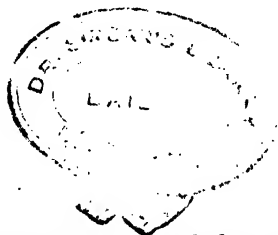


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PRISONERS OF HOPE

By

COSMO
HAMILTON



The gods visit the sins of the fathers upon the children."

FIFTH EDITION

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PART I
BEFORE THE WAR

PRISONERS OF HOPE

CHAPTER I

"My dear Lumley," said Lady George Cornish, who, in spite of having been a barmaid for several years and in the habit of calling waiters by their Christian names, now addressed her husband by his surname as though he were a Peer, "if you want ter ge-ow, ge-ow. Thet's all I've got ter say. Gather yerself together, fish three and sixpence out of mer bag, drip out the dregs of the bottle of champagne, and melt away like butter in the sun. When I come to a Covent Garden Ball I sleep all day and mer vitality ain't worked out until the bally band dies in its shoes."

She turned away her all too golden head, gave him a vast expanse of powdered back, and flashed upon the kaleidoscopic scene beneath the box her once very beautiful eyes. The band of black with which the poor soul surrounded them now was as broad as the one used by Frenchmen on their writing paper as a mark of respect and sometimes affection for a just deceased relative. It gave a touch of grotesque pathos to an unacknowledged wreck.

Algernon Lumley did not find it easy to talk above that miraculously persistent band and the everlasting swish of dancing feet. A quiet man, who revelled in silences, his voice was quiet, as were his clothes, his tread, and a history whose rather queer echoes

had almost died away. And in any case what was the use of talking? As well attempt to move the Rigi with a volley of blank cartridges as dissuade Kitty Cornish from a fixed idea with mere gentlemanly words. Then, too, she was more than his wife. She was his banker. The fifteen hundred a year into which she had come when George had died like a fish in a bottle had saved him from competing with the collar stud and bootlace merchants in the streets of London. With a shrug of the shoulders he put away, therefore, the watch that he had inherited from George, rose and stood in one of his unconsciously graceful attitudes in a corner of the box. To this, as to every place, he lent an air of great distinction with his liquid height, his Stuart profile, his snow-white hair, and a dyed moustache upon which he lavished as much care and attention as most men devote to golf.

On the great space below there were at least two thousand temporarily demented people wobbling about in one unholy mass, like just caught flies on a sheet of sticky paper. Many of the younger men, slim, sinuous, and simpering, looked, in their elaborate fancy dress, like women, but all the women could not be mistaken for anything else in costumes which outdid Baedeker as a guide to sight-seers. The stammering rag-time with the thrumming under-current of banjos rose into an atmosphere heavy with the reek of scent, powder, and cigarette smoke. All the other boxes were filled with fantastic people who came and went like bees in a Gargantuan honeycomb.

"Then, too, as you know as well as I do," added Lady George at the top of her voice, "I've asked

some of the boys to drop in 'ere about three o'clock for an 'am sandwich and a glasser two. Nice thing if they came up and found that you had marched me off 'ome and left 'em flat, I don't think."

Although she wasn't looking, Lumley bowed and waved his hand as who should say, "My dear old thing, I am not arguing. Have it your own way. You always do, and you have the right."

She knew both gestures as well as she knew the remark, but being one of those women who continue to fight long after the battle has been won she carried on her reproaches in the vain hope of getting something back which would give her a legitimate reason for further indignation and eloquence. She ought to have been an opera singer, so that she must have been obliged to save her voice between performances.

The only thing that she held up against Lumley was his lack of imagination. He simply could not understand that, for the sake of her self-respect, a wife ought to be provided with something to grumble at even if it is fictitious.

By putting up with her ever-varying moods, by escorting her into places and functions and that strange and lamentable company who came out of the shady corners of London into the glare of its night lights, he considered that he worked as hard for a living as all the conscientious men who slaved at City desks. He was, however, a grateful person. He performed his duties cheerfully, showed no impatience or irritation, and in his own peculiar undemonstrative and economical way was fond of the woman who had married him for his air of high breeding, but continued to go under the name, without having the slightest right to do so, of the feeble-minded

man to whom she had served so many brandies and sodas.

Uncommonly beautiful in her youth, this kind, easy, trying, pathetic, and often bibulous woman had flourished at the time when it was the fashion among the more idiotic of the sons of the ancient aristocracy to spend their days in going from one to another of the refreshment rooms on the various railway stations, where they drank between trains and became socially familiar with all the most attractive barmaids.

George Lomax Alexander Gerald St. John Cornish, third son of the thirteenth Marquess of Millechester, had joined the railway brigade on coming down from Oxford. A big, lumbering, blond, curly-headed, good-natured creature of the St. Bernard type who, if he had had the energy and the necessary clean eye would have made a magnificent county cricketer, dedicated enough of the best years of his life to the Great Western brandy crawl to achieve the enviable position of its chief exponent. Before he became a confirmed alcoholic, as he did at twenty-eight, it was his proud boast that he knew every bar and every barmaid on the entire system. At a moment's notice, although never at any time after midday, he could give the pet name and a very vivid description of every one of the girls who stood with regulation insolence and decoration behind a thousand counters. But it was to the refreshment room of the station at Reading that he gravitated most frequently, because it was there that Kitty Libby, daughter of a local barber, reigned as queen, dressed always in the height of fashion and the cheapest jewellery.

He was, of course, Geordie to her, and she was

naturally Kitten to him. Under the influence of her sympathetic eye and four star brandy he fell into the habit of confiding his inmost thoughts, and the heartrending account just before closing time, of his being misunderstood by the family. He even went so far eventually as to take rooms in her town, of all places, so that he might be within a few hundred yards of the "one woman on God's green earth" who appreciated his good points and guided him to the door of his lodgings.

And then, suddenly, the brandy crawl habit which had led to several most amusing and amazing marriages was supplanted by the one that developed strongly in 1906 of haunting the musical comedy theatres and making Peeresses of chorus girls. Whereupon George Cornish found himself in sole possession not only of the Reading but every other refreshment room on the Great Western Railway—and it got upon his nerves. He was now a man of two great grievances, because to the family misunderstanding he added the wholesale desertion of the gang. And so, emerging from a more than usually enjoyable attack of delirium tremens, he obtained the strong arm of a friendly and often tipped porter, was escorted from his rooms to the station, entered the familiar and fly-blown room in which the lovely Kitten dispensed spiritual comfort to her customers and leaned feebly on the too familiar counter. "Kitten," he said, "how about trottin' round somewhere with me in the mornin' and gettin' married?"

In all truthfulness it must be said that this extremely worldly young woman, who had clung with the most rigid and sometimes puzzling pride to her virtue, received so great a shock from an unexpected

proposal which would lift her out of the vast mediocrity of her position as a barmaid into the dazzling heights of aristocracy that, for the first time in her career she flooded a small glass of Benedictine and burst into tears during business hours. Like every member of her useful profession she had allowed nothing hitherto to disturb her flashy imperturbability.

They were joined together as soon as the necessary regulations of the Registrar of births, deaths and marriages could be overcome, and lived an almost ideal life until another Registrar was called in to fill in the form for George's exit from all mortal worries. It need hardly be said that in addition to her wifely duties Lady George had performed those of a nurse, a watcher, a prohibition agent, a gaoler, and a guide, and all these she had carried out with a garrulous devotion that was inspiring to behold.

A broken woman in the early forties she then made the fatal mistake of retiring from the elasticity of semi-society and a flat in Shaftesbury Avenue in which she had entertained actors and horse-trainers, bankrupts and members of Parliament, a Duke or two, several Honourables, a Scotch company promoter who played underhand games with newspapers, and many of those great optimists who followed the races and played cards for a living, to bury herself in a remote corner of Buckinghamshire, where the county continued the old-fashioned practice of drawing the line. There, in a charming cottage with a lovely garden, her existence was completely ignored by everyone of any social standing for miles around. The Vicar gladly would have called upon her, having had a penchant for barmaids in his undergraduate

days, but his wife threatened to write to the Bishop if he so far departed from the country cue.

With greying hair and a strangely unmade up and wistful face the lonely widow chummed with her rural maid, surfeited herself with novels, and underwent a long and presently devastating rest-cure, growing finally to hate the sight of wisteria, to resent the exquisite scents and sounds of her rustic surroundings, and pine for people, buses, shops, restaurants, and the old night life. And when, one lucky day, a wealthy New York woman found the village in her motor-car, fell hysterically in love with the cottage and made a sentimental offer for its purchase, Lady George seized the breath-taking cheque, shook her fist at the Chiltern Hills, returned to London with eager joy, and rented a stuffy little house in Hill Street, Knightsbridge.

But being ashamed to face the old and evergreen lot in all her clean and pathetic naturalness, she placed herself in the hands of one of those terrible creatures who call themselves beauty specialists, and underwent all the horrors of renovation. The white fantail pigeons which had been her so devoted friends, perching confidently on her shoulders and taking grain with the utmost delicacy from her uncoloured lips, would never have recognized the painted lady with the iron-twisted yellow hair who was welcomed back to shadiness by the London regiment of rastaquiers who saw in this full-blown elderly member one who was ever ready to win their constant company with a good table and a well-stocked cellar.

Her reaction from rusticity and the cold shoulder married her almost immediately, of course, into a second marriage. One glance at Algernon had been

enough. Shabby and starving as he was when she met him she recognized in him the antithesis of the bibulous and drink stained George, discovered that he really had been a Major in a crack cavalry regiment, and married him to revenge herself upon the Buckinghamshire Lumleys to whom he belonged, and who had tilted their noses when they had driven past her cottage every day. And by refusing to take his name she gloried in the belief that she had put a blight upon them from which they never could recover, notwithstanding the fact that they had refused to claim this graceful and disgraceful relative for very many years.

The second marriage had been as great a success as the first one, but this time it often fell to the lot of the Major, according to the inevitable laws of poetic justice, to guide his wife's faltering steps to the little house in Knightsbridge.

II

Teddy Sherwood was the first of the boys to visit the box at the appointed hour, and being the only man of her wide acquaintance who drew a large and steady income from a reputable source, Lady George greeted him with effusion.

"Oh, hello, Teddy dear," she said, the inexhaustible band making it necessary for her to sing her welcome in the manner of a stentorian Brunhilde, "where's the others?"

Sherwood's honest bourgeois face wore so angry a scowl that he brought immediately into the comparative peace of that domestic atmosphere a strong

and impending sense of trouble. He was not in fancy clothes. Every inch of him showed plainly that he detested dressing up. He wore a dinner jacket in which, with his immense breadth of chest and short, thick, bandy legs he easily might have been mistaken for a gymnasium instructor at a dance given by his Masonic Lodge. He was the son of Sherwood of Everybody's Grocery Shops, that's who he was ; a damned common man, and he didn't care who knew it. In fact, he advertised the fact. He had done so at Charterhouse and Merton. And he still did it, and always would. Sherwood—the name was as well known as Lipton, or the A.B.C., or Dewar. He suffered from that inverted form of snobbishness which makes men boast of having started life with half a crown. Very different from the greater number of the men with whom he chose to herd, who persisted in calling themselves gentlemen merely because the accident of birth had given them names that were to be found in Debrett.

“Don't ask me,” he said shortly, pushing a chair into a corner and sitting down with his back to the outer world.

Lady George, much to Lumley's astonishment, did not ask. Never before had he known her to miss an opportunity to exercise her tongue. She had, however, kept her eyes open since the commencement of the ball, and had seen something happen which made her very well aware of the reason for this man's deep anger and dangerous jealousy. With an air of almost comical pride he had arrived in the first rush, she had seen, with a girl who had at once arrested her attention. With hair as golden as the petals of a buttercup, a small oval face with a tip-tilted

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impertinent nose, laughing lips, and eyes as blue as a robin's egg, her delicate roundness and youthfulness, her tiny ankles and wrists were apparent to any eye from the fact that she wore the trying costume of a ballerina. And although there had never been much poetry in Lady George's battered soul she had told herself, as she had looked down from her high perch, that this young thing might have been a wild flower that had fallen out of Heaven and landed stem first into a puff of snow white cloud.

- Herself tall and full blown, with wide shoulders and even in her prime a tendency, if she had permitted it to conquer, to become Rubensesque, as she was now, Lady George, like all Juno women, envied and admired the small-boned, exquisitely coloured Nattier type beyond the power of words. And so, poor old world worn but romantic creature, she had followed this alluring little figure through the fast increasing maze with pathetic interest, caught Teddy Sherwood's eager joy in dancing with her, watched the way in which "that rotter" Tony Fortescue had cut in suddenly at about half-past one and, with an utter disregard for moral or civil codes or for the feelings of the man who had often lent his money and put him up when there was no other roof for his head than that of a doss-house, had absorbed her ever since. At that moment they were dancing together. Lady George could pick out the enviable form of the girl and the tall wiry body of Tony dressed as a Dulac Pierrot among the many coloured crowd.

Who this girl was, and where Sherwood, who had the reputation of being a misogynist, had found her, Lady George, whose once detective memory for faces had become considerably blurred, had not the remotest

idea. By the unusual ecstacy that was stamped upon him when he had brought her to the floor, his bitter annoyance and dejection at having been used and dropped, and his present attitude of smouldering rage as he sat like a volcano in the dark corner, it was not difficult to guess that, before the ball was over, Teddy Sherwood would see red and fight.

Like everybody else, Lady George was very fond of the Hon. Anthony Stirling Fortescue—who could help it?—but so far as this incident went Sherwood had her sympathy for his abominable treatment on the part of a man to whom he had been so generous. She considered, therefore, that the grounds for the ugly fracas that was bound to come were sound and good, and she could not help being anxious to see justice meted out. It did not occur to her to put any share of the blame upon the girl for allowing herself to be carried away, because Tony, as she had said so often, was irresistible, with his high spirits, his infernal impudence, and his extraordinary good looks. All the same, belonging to the aristocracy by both her marriage ties, she hoped that when Sherwood did let himself go it would not be in or near her box. She had no desire to see her name in the Police Court news.

She had not forgotten, nor ever would, the whirlwind attack that Sherwood had made upon three men in Leicester Square one night who had gone a little too far in their badinage. In a very few minutes they had been rendered temporarily unrecognizable under a battering which had been so savage and relentless as to make shuttlers run up and down the spines of the most cold-blooded members of her theatre party.

"Lumley," she sang out, "give Teddy Sherwood a glass of champagne."

"Oh my dear fellow, I beg your pardon," said the Major, "I don't know what I was thinking about."

"Think about whiskey," said Sherwood rudely. "That's what I need."

And when he filled a tumbler and drank it neat at a gulp, repeated the process and rose to his feet in all his monkey-like strength, Lady George was thrilled to the marrow. Woman-like, she had an intense admiration for primeval man and the same joy at the sight of blood that took so many of her sisters to prize fights and the bull ring. In another instant she expected to see this outraged man mount to the rim of the box, take a flying leap to the floor below and grapple murderously with the disloyal friend who had taken his girl away.

The girl, as she ought to have known at once, was Chrissie Bunning who, having brought herself up to the supreme pitch of courage that enables perfectly sane people to commit suicide, was dancing round the face of the clock.

III

It may or may not be remembered that long before the Duncan Sisters came over from America to sing their quaint and amusing little songs, dressed like the youngest of the numerous children of an over-worked small town store keeper, the most popular turn on the London music halls was given by two clever and charming girls who were billed as Sissie and Chrissie. The fact that they were twins and so

exactly alike that when Chrissie slipped suddenly into Sissie's place at the piano nobody believed that the change had been made, added a curious piquancy to their very delightful and very ingenious programme. It gave people the chance, too, of betting as to who was who, and thus attracted to the houses in which they performed a public who otherwise would have spent the evening at the card table or the billiard room.

The orphans of a man who had driven one of the London horse buses until they had been superseded by motors, and his wife who had worked herself into a premature grave in the gallant endeavour to keep her family's head above water by charing, these girls had not won their way to the top line of the Coliseum without the usual struggles and the inevitable demand for physical purchase.

At a time when even the most precocious children are still seen and not heard, these two funny looking little sparrows began to chirp. Inheriting the bent for music from their father, who played the mouth organ to complete perfection, they were encouraged at school and set up in the parlour of the Fulham Road tenement building to show off. Also they were taught to play the piano gratis by the German conductor of a suburban theatre who lived in the next door flat. From the frequent street organs which brought a fleeting joy into the ugly dullness of their world, they picked up all the popular airs of the moment, and with gestures invented by themselves sang them together to admiring neighbours. At the age of twelve, though they were still tiny enough to be taken for eight, they began to work out little songs of their own, adaptations of ~~nursery rhymes~~

for the most part, touched with the quaint sense of humour that develops in the London streets, with melodies founded, like those of all writers of popular music, on the successful efforts of a hundred pens. Both of them now played the piano with all the astonishing dash and flourish of the average piano tuner, but that was all. In other words, they conveyed the impression of being able to do very much more than they did, which succeeded in raising them to the altitude of musical prodigies in the estimation of their schoolfellows and the friends of their parents.

It was then that their father, dismounted from his bus, died of humiliation and anger after having walked the streets for a year. Carbon had something to do with his death, of course, because he took to haunting his old bus yard in order to cast vituperation upon the abominable invention which had put him and his horses on the shelf, and the fumes from back-firing engines flowed down his open throat. He was one of numerous martyrs to the unhappy cause of progress.

When the girls were sixteen, their worn mother arrived at the end of her breath, fell all the way down the long flight of stairs that she had just scrubbed in the offices of the Fulham gas company, and with one last anxious thought for her pretty twins passed immediately with a glorious welcome into the special corner that is reserved in Heaven for widowed charwomen.

After a period of overwhelming grief followed by three years of semi-starvation Luck tapped the two little buttercup girls on the shoulder. Through the influence of the German conductor they were engaged, on a joint salary of a pound a week, by the manager

of a troupe of pierrots¹ who performed in a tent on the sands of Blackpool, and on the small rickety stage of this sometimes hot, but more frequently chilly, enclosure appeared in the short frocks of children of six, and brought great prosperity to the modern Scrooge who had signed them on for the season and refused to raise their salary. Even on that, however, they managed to keep body and soul together, and avoid the temptations of more and easier money that came to them from lascivious holiday makers who "liked 'em young."

A fine offer to appear in the Christmas pantomime at a large midland city was refused because it carried with it a clause for alternate week-ends with Mr. Cooper Marsley, the owner of the theatre, and so Sissie and Chrissie toured the small towns with a vaudeville troupe. Finally, after a series of humiliations, sarcasms, degrading atmospheres in which they retained their bloom like a pot of geraniums on the window sill of a brothel, proffered contracts for London engagements from agents who invariably demanded the *quid pro quo*, they were given the opportunity to appear at the Coliseum as an extra turn in the off season, and in the colloquial language of the "Gentleman with the Eyeglass" who wrote about London in an evening paper, "they stopped the show."

"Miracles sometimes happen," he wrote. "I know, because I saw one last night with my one good eye. It came upon the audience in St. Martin's Lane after the heartrending efforts of an elderly *prima donna* to mount to the giddy heights of C, and two beefy Swedes who flung cannon balls at each other in the laudable but unsuccessful attempt

to break each other's necks.¹ Out came those awful words that so often spell amateurishness, imitation, and the boredom that can be cut with a knife—'Extra Turn,' and just as the house was rising as one man to occupy the bar the curtain went up on two diminutive girls, so clean and yellow and young that they looked like chickens who had just tapped themselves out of their shells. Or, better still, (my, ain't I eloquent?) two perfect and arresting pieces of Copenhagen were designed by an artist who loved his Heavenly Twins. Twins they were, so astonishingly and amazingly alike as to make one afraid for a moment that one had got 'em again, and oh my dears, how heavenly! Words fail my overworked pen in an endeavour to describe the effect upon the immediately reseated audience at the sight of these two. Honestly, and if I weren't honest I shouldn't have been there to find the elusive copy for my column, it was like a shaft of sunlight on a drab wall, a puff of sea breeze in the Black Hole of Calcutta. They sang, playing their own accompaniments, first one and then the other, sitting at or perched upon the piano. They sang together, and played together and laughed together, enjoying themselves as much as we enjoyed them. They were as deft and charming as gambolling kittens with a ball of wool, or spring lambs with a slight attack of hysteria. They went from melody to melody, from skit to skit, strange, surprising, witty, unexpected, spontaneous, utterly unselfconscious or coy, and sometimes so whimsical that they might have been two of Wendy's children playing truant from the brain of J. M. Barrie. Therefore, when I say that they stopped the show I mean it literally. The audience was as delightfully surprised

as a great party of street urchins at the first sight of the Channel. Encore after encore was demanded, with such applause as I have only heard in that theatre when Mascagni conducted his one famous opera and Sarah Bernhardt limped gloriously through the torture scene of La Tosca. And when they had obviously gone through every blessed thing they knew twice they were brought back again and again for the sheer pleasure of taking part in their joy and amazement. The whole bill was disrupted. The house deliberately emptied itself into the street as a final spontaneous mark of admiration and respect after the waiting artists had rushed on to the stage and carried these children round on their shoulders between laughter and tears. It really was an amazing and unforgettable evening, a demonstration of true and well-deserved enthusiasm for talent hitherto obviously unrecognized by theatre people, from the fact that theirs should have been the featured and not the extra turn by all the rights of the game. And it is the easiest thing in the world to predict that on the top of next week's programme the names of Sissie and Chrissie will stand out in the largest and boldest red letters that can be found in all the printers' shops in this our city. The Gentleman with the Eyeglass will lay his enormous salary on that, good friends."

But as no one came forward to take his bet he made no extraneous and always welcome money. But he did have the satisfaction of seeing his bursting paragraph quoted in full in the newspaper advertisements and on a special board that was displayed outside the theatre for several weeks of capacity business. And one of the proudest boasts of that kind, hard

driven little man, who couldn't have kept an eyeglass in either of his eyes for all the money on earth, was that he had helped to discover the blue and gold sisters who had emerged disillusioned, shabby and spotless into the glare of publicity and success, to rank with George Robey and Vesta Tilley in the warm hearts of the British public.

All went well. From London they were booked into the large cities where extended engagements of from two to three weeks followed as a matter of course. Outside all the stage doors at every performance crowds of women and girls pushed sheepish men behind to see the new favourites come forth, to cry out "Hello, Sissie" to Chrissie, and "Hello, Chrissie" to Sissie and roar with laughter when, in graphic dumb show, the mistake was pointed out. They revelled in triumph, these two, and with the unbelievable money paid at the end of the week set up wardrobes of perfectly appalling garments, bought every inappropriate hat that could be found, drove about in antiquated flies in memory of their father, and covered themselves with as many beads and bangles as are worn by Zulu princesses. Also they remembered to send frequent postal orders to their less successful friends among the pierrots, and took dancing lessons from the best available masters in every visited city.

Every day found them hard at work polishing up their best numbers, rehearsing new ones, devising original and ingenious bits of business, practising effects which would look as though they were spontaneous, impromptu that were carefully thought out, and back answers to the leader of the orchestra that had all the appearance of being made on the spur of

the moment. Never satisfied, they studied the latest slang, watched the current events, and wrote songs, for encores, which were steeped in the thick sentimentality so dear to the lower middle classes.

Their greatest assets, and they were wise enough to recognize them, were joy, laughter, spontaneity, and sweetness. They never forgot that line in the paragraph by "The Gentleman with the Eyeglass" as to their being Wendy's children who had played truant from the brain of J. M. Barrie. They clung to that with all the desperation of tired swimmers to a spar. It gave them a patent, a trade mark, a cachet, a motto, and a never failing cue to new numbers. They were everybody's little angels, the Cockney sparrows on the sunny side of the City streets, and so they chirped rather than sang. They remained, so to speak, in the parlour at a party, showing off in their Sunday frocks to a circle of neighbours. It was all very well thought out, very cunning and excellent and universal. They knew that if they could earn the extraordinary distinction of having it said about them that they were far too nice to be on the stage, poor dears, they were as safe as the Bank of England.

And then one night in the treacherous March of 1914, almost exactly two years after they had sprung into fame, Sissie caught a chill on a draughty stage, played till the end of the week with a high temperature, was taken to the hospital on Sunday morning with double pneumonia, and on Thursday morning was followed to the grave by nearly every woman and child in Manchester. No such outburst of emotion had ever been enacted in that practical city, and if there were no expensive wreaths dropped into that

little hole in the earth there were thousands of good tears.

Poor little Chrissie, aghast, dumbfounded, stricken down by grief as a young tree torn from its roots by lightning, haunted the graveyard for several untranslatable days. And then, taking hold of herself with a great grip, she returned into life feeling as though she had had all one side of her body cut off under a frightful operation. Letters and telegrams of condolence, very real and sincere, poured down upon her from all parts of England, and the members of her profession met and passed a resolution of deep regret. It is indeed true to say that the death of Sissie came as a shock to all kinds and conditions of people. That one of those blue and gold children could die, when life seemed so essentially her right—it was cruel, it was wrong, it was disturbing! But, when Chrissie presented herself to the managers who had been so eager for the services of the two sisters expecting to be able to work to the honour and memory of the girl from whom she had never been separated before, they shrugged their shoulders and raised their eyebrows and shook their heads. “My dear,” they said, “it’s a rotten shame, no one knows that better than we do. But, you see, the value of your turn lay in the fact that you were twins. Simply that. Without Sissie . . . Very sorry. If you could find a young man, a performing dog, a little monkey . . . Well, there it is. Good morning, my dear. Keep in touch.”

But Chrissie made no attempt to find a young man, a performing dog, or a little monkey. Nor did she keep in touch. It was written that her day was over. At eighteen she found that she might just as well be

in the earth with her sister as in the running with the managers. Those hide-bound people who catered to a public whom they never understood could not see the sentimental value that attached to a great favourite whose partner had been removed by death. Nor were they imaginative enough to appreciate the immense support that would be given to a girl of peculiar gifts who had the courage to appear as Chrissie-all-alone.

With the usual improvidence and generosity of her kind she had saved nothing. She marked time for a few weeks on the money that came from the sale of her foolish trinkets while she made up her mind as to the manner in which she should rejoin her twin. An offer of marriage from Teddy Sherwood, made for the twentieth time, did not tempt her away from the determination to make her final exit. If she had loved him she would have been glad to remain alive, go far away into the country, look after a garden, have children, and be a good wife. But she didn't love him. He frightened her. He was kind enough and sane enough on ordinary occasions, a sort of self-appointed brother during the six months that he had followed her from city to city, never missing a performance, looking after the stage set in which she and her sister had done their turn and the increasing luggage that went with them from place to place, but in the moments when he had sprung out of his enforced reserve he had shown her something of madness, something of a passion that made him ugly. She was afraid. And there was no one else. And so, having booked a ticket on the six o'clock train that was to cross the invisible bridge she had accepted Sherwood's invitation to the Covent

Garden Ball in order that she might dance until the last moment and there met Tony Fortescue.

By an odd and unexplainable fluke, waster as she knew him to be, because the stories of his misdeeds were common property, frequently advertised in the wrong columns of the newspapers, he was the first man who had ever put an extra beat into her pulse, and as the moment approached when she knew that he was due to keep his appointment with Lady George for a ham sandwich and a glass or two, and she should have gone back to her rooms to write a letter to the Coroner, life had become too precious a thing to lose, especially when, after having held her in his arms for two hours, he bent down suddenly and kissed her lips.

CHAPTER II

I

It was not the first kiss that had been snatched by a trespasser, but it was the first that had touched the undiscovered spring of Chrissie's virgin heart.

For a moment she went limp and giddy. The whole floor swam in a blur of colours. Then she seemed to rise as though on wings, with a brain that was flooded with music.

"Oh good Lord!" said Tony, "what's the row? I'm desperately sorry. Do forgive me."

That a girl should faint because she was kissed was an utterly new thing to him. He had kissed all and sundry without thinking twice. And now that he came to think about it there had been something—what could he call it—fey? in the eyes of this girl to whom he had been drawn as by a magnet and had always wanted to meet. She must be ill. Selfish fool that he was he had worn her out in an orgy of dancing. It wasn't his unpreventable kiss that had affected her. It was sheer physical fatigue. And so, much ashamed of himself, as he still had the knack of being, and acting on the tip of an impulse, as he always did, he picked her up in his arms, carried her through the dancers to a room in the foyer that was the office of a friend connected with the management, and set her down with the utmost care and gentleness.

And when she looked up into his distressed and anxious face she saw not the disreputable, devil-may-care, handsome, dissipated night bird, deep in

cynicism, but, in an imagination that had been steeped in fairy tales, a very perfect knight in a coat of mail, gallant and chivalrous and humble. And when this flash of second sight faded, which, had it been communicated then to any of Tony's associates, would have brought forth a yell of derisive laughter, Chrissie said to herself in the Fulham Road language to which she had been bred, and into which she fell in moments of unwatchfulness, "This man one of the boys? Outside, maybe, but underneath he's the only bloomin' gent I've ever struck."

She gave him a smile, turned away in a panic of self-consciousness, and sat on her legs on the sofa. It was extraordinary, so suddenly to have been transplanted from the great floor of clashing colours, never ending sounds and restless movements to this small oasis of silence. A mere commonplace hole in the wall with a roll-top desk, signed photographs of the De Reszkes, Melba, Caruso, and many other less famous operatic stars, a chair, a sofa, a safe, office paraphernalia, a worn strip of turkey carpet and a stale smell of tobacco, it seemed to her to be, at that moment of shattered plans, a wharf at the mouth of a swift river to which she had attached her frail craft by a miracle.

She was a puzzle to Tony. Until a few seconds ago, when he had held her in his arms a fainting girl whose flowerlike face had gone as white as her diminutive skirt, he had had his work cut out to keep up with the gaiety and abounding energy of his partner, the tip of whose funny little nose didn't come up to his shoulder. And now he stood looking down at a shy child with a trusting smile in her wide blue eyes and a spot of colour on each cheek that might have

been left there by the touch of wet rose leaves. The look that he had called *fey* was gone.

"I can't make you out," he said. "Just as I am going to dash forth and S.O.S. for a doctor you've come back to life, and look as if you could go on dancing for a week. Is that true, or do I dream it?"

There was a short silence, during which she went in spirit to her lodgings in Westminster Bridge Road, and looked at the sinister bottle that was hidden under some of her clothes in a drawer.

"I dunno," she said. "But I think so." And before she could stop herself she added, "It all depends on you."

"On me? How?" There was something wildly paradoxical in that telephone operator accent on the lips of this exquisite little Fragonard. It had amused him when he had heard it times without number from the stalls and thought that it was assumed for the sake of local colour. It fascinated him now. It was so absurd. Surprising, too, like hearing a Highlander talk French or a Parsee speak with the manner of a Balliol blood. He liked being surprised, and so seldom was. And now that he saw her closely he asked himself if she were as old as the Sphinx or as young as to-morrow.

She covered her naïveté by rapping out the sort of quick back answer which she had cultivated with such care in her business. "Well, I suppose you can nip out and pinch a syphon of soda water and a couple of chicken sandwiches? Those and this quiet'll do the trick."

"Of course I can," he said. "From Lady George," and made for the door.

"No, don't. I don't want 'em. I'm as right as

rain, reely. Please." And she stretched out her hand, small, delicate, and capable, and put into her eyes a look which hauled him up as securely as a well flung lasso. It had come to her as an inspiration that the deserted Teddy Sherwood was waiting for them in Lady George's box, and already having seen him in the agony of jealousy all that was protective in her nature exerted itself to prevent his meeting Tony.

Teddy Sherwood was, however, not in the box at that moment. Having been unable to catch sight of the puff of ballet skirt among the dancers he was hunting rapidly along the passages with a lust for blood. Once already he had passed the door of the room in which these two were destined to discover each other and the truth of things.

So Tony turned and went back, wondering why he didn't take her in his arms once more and kiss her again, as he would have done but for that odd touch of primness which had made her regret the shortness of her skirt. He had quick eyes. And as he stood there in his much waisted unpaid-for coat, immaculate tie and eccentrically wide trousers, his sleek hair as undisturbed as though he had just left the hands of the barber to whom as to everybody else he owed money, the characteristic impudence was missing from his expression. Never in the slightest degree self-conscious, a distressing infliction that makes men act, he was now perfectly straightforward in his complete interest in this queer little girl with the yellow hair, blue eyes, and tiptilted nose, who seemed to have stopped growing in her early teens and to contradict sophistication by an out-of-date modesty. He found that the irresistible desire

to touch that had made him take her away from his friend, though stronger than ever, was held in most unusual check by curiosity, sympathy, and respect. He was ready to bet all the money he owed that there was a great pain behind that smile and that well-trained assumption of gaiety. He was going to exert himself to find out what it was, and if it was in his power to help to do so out of gratitude not only for the enjoyment that she and her sister had given him in the theatre, but because he was dominated by a superstitious feeling that he and she had been brought together for a reason impossible to define. As a man who backed his luck he was a prey to superstition, and followed impulses as sounder men acted on calm judgment.

"As a rule there's a bottle of whiskey here," he said, and opened the bottom drawer of the desk. "Yes, though badly hit."

"Not for me," said Chrissie.

"No? Not just a mouthful to warm the cockles? Always useful." He held the bottle with a certain affection.

"I don't drink," she said, with the fearlessness of ridicule which had made it easy for her to keep off the steep path.

"Very wise, very exemplary. I'm all against it too." He assumed an air of profound righteousness. "But I hate to see waste," and the remaining two fingers went down extremely well. "Do you smoke by any chance?"

"Try me," she said, dryly.

He fished out a packet of Three Castles that was rather warm and crumpled. "I'm always losing my case," he said, without the slightest suspicion of

a smile. "So I've taken to leaving it in the tender care of my old friend Attenborough."

Attenborough had been a friend of hers too, since she had received the verdict of the managers. All her trinkets had passed over his counter into the mysterious recesses that contained so many fruits of various misfortune.

He straightened out a cigarette and gave her a light. She inhaled like a Greek he saw, and felt that they stood on ground that was a little less uneven.

And as he lit one for himself she ran her eyes over his tall, wiry, graceful figure, small, well-shaped head and a profile such as she had seen in the pictures by the old masters in the National Gallery. The stories of his having been sent down from Oxford, kicked out of his father's house, passed through the Bankruptcy Court, run into Bow Street, and of his reckless adventures in quest of a living without work, were true enough she knew. The latest about Tony Fortesque was always a part of London conversation. But she told herself in extenuation of his misdeeds, as all good women do, that he had been misunderstood and without the love that makes sacrifices and the inspiration to go straight. Give *her* the chance! She could put him back into a coat of mail, she could.

He pitched away his cigarette, drew up a chair, sat down with his knees against the sofa, bent forward and took her hands.

"Although you don't happen to know it, Chrissie, I'm one of your oldest London friends," he said.

"What makes you think so?" she asked, wrinkling her nose.

"I was at the Coliseum the night that you and Sissie were put on as an extra turn, and yelling

for encores gave me a sore throat for a week." He laughed at the recollection of his unwonted enthusiasm.

The unexpected mention of her sister's name flooded her eyes and sent a tremble all along her lips.

"Oh my God," he said, as back into his mind came the accounts of the twin's sudden death, and the description of the Manchester funeral. He had forgotten this tragic incident when he had so ruthlessly taken Chrissie from his friend. He had forgotten, also, the gossip among music hall artists, of whom he knew many, of her being down and out, not bookable alone. A remarkable memory is demanded of people who are under the despotism of newspapers with their twice daily service of the world's sufferings. "Now I begin to understand . . . My poor kid. I'm awfully sorry." He put his cheek against her cheek in an impulse of sympathy.

There had been no one, except a kind landlady in her Manchester lodgings to mother her in her grief. This human touch was good! And presently, still sitting in this way, she drew a long breath and said "A bit of luck meeting you."

"It will be if I know anything about luck—and I do, because I've lived on it." And he put his arms round her shoulders and added, "You were going to take something this morning, weren't you? Tell me."

"What made you guess that? I've been laughing ever since you cut in."

"The look in your eyes. I've seen it before. It always means the same thing."

"Yes," she said simply. "That's what it was all right."

"No need to ask why. You lovely quaint thing, you don't look old enough to have acquired the courage to do that thing."

"I had it because I'm not old enough," she said. "Nothing to lose. No one to break from. No roots. It's different now."

"Why is it?"

She didn't answer.

But he felt that she came a little closer to him.

"You can tell *me*," he said. "You *ought* to tell me. Why did we meet like this on what was going to be your last night? Why are we here now?"

"It's different because of you," she said, with her usual honesty.

Whereupon he drew back quickly, took her little face in his hands, and looked deeply into her eyes. . . . He had been right to feel superstitious then. He had not intended to come to this fool ball where he was bound to rub shoulders with all the people of whom, temporarily, he was sick. On the way to a gambling club he had felt a sudden pull to divert the cab, and he had done so instantly. He obeyed such hunches implicitly, in backing horses, at baccarat. It was the elusive hand of luck. And here was this extraordinary girl, who had fallen from the top of the tree, whom he had always wanted to meet and couldn't, because she and her sister had dodged extraneous men, and whom he had drawn back from the threshold of death.

There was no argument. She was his. He claimed her. And he was hers. He knew it. Everything in his spirit cried it out. He was to give her life, and she, a twin without her sister, as lucky as a load of hay on a cart with a white horse, a new moon seen

over the left shoulder, a hunchback on the right-hand side on Derby Day, was his mascot and his girl. She couldn't work for herself and he couldn't work for her. He never worked. But if he could keep his own head above water as an expert swimmer he could hold hers above as well. It was a certainty. A snip. The best thing in racing.

He kissed her then and shot out a kind of triumphant cry. "All right," he said. "From this moment you and I are against the bally world. Is that a bargain?"

She nodded with a smile of utter adoration, and put her cheek against his cheek again.

II

It was five o'clock when Teddy Sherwood returned to the box. During his absence he had dashed off rapidly to half a dozen of Tony's haunts—the cabmen's shelters in various parts of the town to which that "blighter" so frequently went for a preliminary breakfast with anyone who was still awake, the restaurants having closed at a respectable hour.

He had been driven into Westminster Bridge Road, too, to see if there were a light in Chrissie's window.

He had come back to Covent Garden because he felt, poor devil, that in Lady George he had a friend. The effect of whiskey had worn off, but not of jealousy.

He was more than ever determined to make Tony pay for his ruined evening, however long he had to wait. He was a man who not only never forgave, in the manner of most of his brother Christians, but

who fostered a spirit of revenge with a sort of inverted enjoyment.

Sticking to his post to the bitter end there was the now sunken-eyed Major. In one of his early examinable chapters he must surely have played the patient part of A.D.C. to a Colonial Governor, and been placed at the disposal of a social-minded wife.

Several men were surrounding Lady George. It is true that she had imbibed a little too much wine, and that her hair had become a trifle careless. She was, as she always had been, excitable in the presence of any man who wasn't her husband, and not only did her tongue run away with her, but her gestures, her facial expressions, and her laugh, especially her laugh, which went on loudly, for no reason at all, like that of an Irish cook out under the moon with a friend. One of her guests was Mortimer Pollock, whose brilliant pen, though he was seldom in a condition to use it, did almost as much to show the public what egregious little peddlers the leading politicians were as the muddles they made. Another was a strangely excellent actor, whose metier it was to give far too truthful portraits of men in senile decay, and as he rarely got the chance because the public had no liking for the raw truth upon the stage was nearly always and unwillingly resting. And the others were gentlemen of no visible means, like Tony Fortesque, who worked far harder to keep alive by not working than if they worked for a living—very presentable until one got too close, when the tremble of the hands and the maplike red lines that ran from cheek to cheek via an undoubted family nose became apparent. They put up with the illustrated volubility of dear old Kitty for the sake of what she could

give them to eat and drink, and then, like yachts that were liable to meet with fogs, laid in a plentiful supply.

Among these nimble but energetic people who no longer perched upon even the most attenuated branches of their family trees the plebeian Teddy was curiously out of place. He was like an ill-bred terrier among gun-shy pedigree dogs. They allowed him into their range of vision with an air of patronage because he was the possessor of the sort of income of which they dreamed in half-waking moments.

The floor was almost as crowded as when Sherwood had left the building. People danced on and on, as though they had been wound up, and the band went from tune to tune like a body of mechanical figures. The whole thing, in spite of all the colours of the rainbow, had settled down into a dull and joyless orgy of irresistible movement. It might have been a form of punishment ordained by a despot with a sense of the ridiculous.

How long Lady George would have had to wait until the orchestra died in its shoes cannot be decided. At the moment when Tony Fortesque led Chrissie into the box, singing out "Hullo, everybody," and Teddy Sherwood got up to spring at his throat, a scream so piercing rose above the music that it shattered into confusion and stopped, while every woman fell away from her partner, and thousands of eyes, shocked suddenly into intelligence, turned to the place from whence it came.

Lady George, who had been tuned up to drama by Sherwood's attitude, jumped, as she would have said, out of her skin, and all her party hurried to the edge of the box and leaned over. Tony held Chrissie's

hand in a proprietary grip, and Teddy Sherwood, despoiled of his revenge, cursed the interruption and stood impotent.

In an empty box on the second tier a man stood with his arms raised above his head. His hair was long and unkempt, his face pale and cadaverous, and he wore spectacles and a rusty suit of black clothes. He might have been a Sinn Féiner or an anti-vaccinationist. He was obviously a fanatic who had stepped in unnoticed from the street.

Satisfied that he had captured the attention of everyone there he began at once to shout in a thin, tubercular voice, tinged with the triumph of one with a horror to impart.

"Fools, fools, thoughtless, sightless fools, dancing, dancing when forests of trees stand ready to be made into crosses to mark the graves of half your people. Before it is too late, go forth from the sham paradise in which ye live, put your ears to the ground, hearken to the industry of great factories that prepare the instruments for the ruin of this world, pray to God for strength and courage, and fit yourselves to play the part of men in the coming holocaust. I tell ye that the hour approacheth when ye will dance to the tune of war, hold each other close in the most unholy fear, fall on your faces before the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, be driven in masses into the bloody maw of guns, fight, curse, shriek, suffer, starve, and if by a miracle ye escape alive meet the foul diseases that will ooze from the reeking earth. I say to you"

What else he would have said was choked back into his mouth by the iron hand of a policeman who marched solemnly into the box, seized him by the

collar, whirled him round, and walked him off in front of a stiff, relentless arm.

There was a burst of catcalls, a scatter of sarcastic cheers, a buzz of talk. Someone called out "Who goes home?" and the answer came with a roar "We do." In the manner of geese that followed a leader a general movement was made to the doors—flaccid pierrots, limping Queens of Sheba, Rajahs, Turks, Tyrolean mountain climbers, diaphanous Persians, monks, nuns, cavaliers, gondoliers, and a concave woman, probably advertising a new reducing medicine, who wore nothing but a suit of black silk tights. With all the appearance of relief the bandmen accepted their quietus and began to put their instruments away. If the fanatic had not succeeded in sending the dancers out to pray he had, at any rate, brought the orgy to an end and packed them off to bed.

"What are you thinking about?" asked Chrissie, looking up into Tony's almost unrecognizable face.

"War," he said with gleaming eyes. "By God, if that man's right, life begins for me."

III

Forgiving everything, even rudeness and neglect, on the part of a good-looking man, Lady George, who had joined in the laughter, swung over illogically to Tony's side. She always thought of him as a darling in spite, or perhaps because, of his numerous bad tricks. And when, as now, he gave her one of his angelic smiles and raised her hands to his lips as though she were a Queen she didn't wobble, she

crashed. But a quick glance at Teddy Sherwood made her very certain that his assault had only been postponed by the ridiculous interruption of that self-appointed prophet of impossible evil, and so with a touch of masterly strategy she worked another tangent.

"Oh, Teddy dear," she said, in her most wheedling voice, "you're the only nippy member of this party. Make a bee-line into the street, like a good boy, bag a taxi for me and wait with it at the corner of York Street until I come along with Lumley. I'll foller at once."

He hesitated, with green eyes on Tony's complacent face.

"Please," she added, and turning him round gave him a little push.

And so he went, blasphemously, nursing his grievance. And the inevitable fracas was averted again.

"Um," said the actor, taking the last of the Major's cigars. "That man ought not to be run into Bow Street as drunk and disorderly. His place is in Downing Street at the head of our fathead Government. He might put conscription through and disturb the German plans for war."

"Bosh!" said Mortimer Pollock, pouring out the dregs of a bottle of champagne. "The Germans have no such plans. War is merely the nightmare of jingoes in this age of intelligence. The Teutonic war machine is maintained as a brilliantly clever method of putting their increasing Communists into uniform. It is the epitome of Kulture, the disciplinary herding system. You're out of date, old boy." He drained his glass.

"Oh, don't say that," said the Major whimsically. "I could do very well with a nice long war. As a pukka soldier who passed through the Staff College I should certainly be given a brass hat, a seat in the war office and pay that would add very greatly to my comfort."

Lady George held out a cordial hand to Chrissie. "Nobody's taken the trouble to introduce us," she said graciously. "And now that I remember where I've seen yer before I suppose they thought there wasn't no need. You're better known than I am, Gungadin." She giggled at what her many sycophants would have called a witty remark. But before Chrissie could answer with more than her funny little way of wrinkling her nose like a rabbit, her hostess turned to Tony with something of anxious haste. "Now's your chance to do a guy, quick."

Tony was genuinely surprised. "Do a guy?" he echoed. "My dear old thing, what do you mean? Chrissie and I are going home with my old friend Teddy for scrambled eggs and the best coffee in London."

"Oh, no, you're not," said Lady George.

"He'll be frightfully disgruntled if we don't."

"You think so, do yer? I always say you're one of the freaks that was born with an extra skin. If you could have seen Teddy's face when he found that you intended to gobble up his partner you wouldn't make that song about scrambled eggs, mer boy. Minced beef would be the proper words to use."

"Yes," said Chrissie, who had seen this man go mad. "Let's slip out and get some breakfast at Lockhart's. It'll be time enough for you to look up Teddy in about a week."

But Tony refused to be mothered into running away. "Poor old Teddy," he said. "He is rather upset, I suppose. I'd forgotten all about his having brought you here, Chrissie. But that's all the more reason for our going home with him. I can apologize and put things right. He's one of the best and as human as they're made. He'll understand. Why don't we all go to Mount Street? His man's a light sleeper, and nothing pleases him so much as showing his extraordinary gifts with a frying-pan."

"Teddy's out to kill," said Lady George.

"My dear old thing," said Tony, in his most soothing manner. "I have as many lives as a cat."

And so Lady George washed her hands of the whole thing. She had brought diplomacy to a fine art in order to shelve a horrible row, and failed. Well, there it was. She could do no more. Tony always had his way. The fight must happen. She was tired. "Why *don't* you make an effort to get out of this infernal place, Lumley?" she snapped, remembering suddenly that she possessed a husband. "Do you think I want ter be the last ter leave the burning ship?" But the word she used was obviously not burning.

"I beg your pardon," said the Major, allowing something of his keen desire to have evacuated the position hours before to show in his expression. A cloak, a vanity case, a pair of opera glasses—these were only a few of the unnecessary things that his wife inconvenienced people with. Someone said of her that she always went about prepared for shipwreck on a desert island, like Micawber. He gathered them all up like a well-trained courier. Whereupon Lady George led the little procession into the passage

and down the main staircase, across the foyer, and into the crowd that surged about the doors. Cars were conspicuous by their absence. Taxis were scarce. People dribbled into the narrow street either to walk home under a sky split by the finger of dawn, or to go in search of some sort of conveyance in which to drive into the purlicus from which they had issued like moths during the final hours of the long departed day.

"I've a cab," said Lady George, "in York Street. I'll give a lift to anybody who lives on the main road between this and Knightsbridge."

But the actor existed in Charing Cross Road. Thank you. He was walking. The air was good. Mortimer Pollock allowed nobody to know where he placed his head at night. He, too, would enjoy the air. Of the others one hung out near Waterloo, another was going to Hammams in Jermyn Street. His constitution needed the hot room in that admirable Turkish bath. The rest slid into the shadows.

And so Tony and Chrissie escorted her wobbling Ladyship to that angle of York Street which once had housed the editorial staff of *The World*—an empty building now, with dirty windows and a doorstep on which scraggy cats sang their midnight songs.

There, sure enough, was Teddy Sherwood, mounting guard over a dilapidated taxi of the vintage of 1905, and there, in that temporarily deserted spot which reeked with the smell of cabbages and was slippery with the water of a street cleaner's hose, the inevitable fight took place.

Without waiting for the garrulous departure of Lady George, Sherwood threw off his hat and overcoat, darted like a bull-dog at the expectant Tony,

cried out "You dirty dog," and aimed a blow at his face.

"My dear old Teddy," said Tony, guarding it. "You have a grievance, I freely admit, but why not let me explain?"

"Explain! I don't want your blasted explanations." And he threw in his left again.

Under the excited eyes of the tousled old woman, who clung to Chrissie to prevent her from breaking into the fracas, and those of the placid Major, who was on the look-out for a prowling policeman, Sherwood's bottled-up rage exploded. Blindly, brutally, but without a vestige of science he lashed out at the lightfooted man who was not only perfectly cool and sober but a boxer of well-known skill—one who had fought for Oxford before his presence had been found undesirable by the authorities, and since then had indulged in many practice rounds with prizefighters in order to keep his eye in.

The affair was made all the more absurd and one-sided from the fact that Tony, merely on his defence, kept up a rattle of light conversation, coaching his opponent as to how to use his feet, how to time his blows, and where to hit for the best effect. All of which, of course, added to the deep store of Sherwood's anger, and made him more and more wild and pathetic. Over and over again Tony could have knocked his friend out with the greatest ease, but, as he always explained, that would have been cruelty to animals. And so the whole business was reduced to farcicality, to the great annoyance of the taxi-driver who enjoyed nothing so much as a jolly good fight. A little to the disappointment, it must be admitted, of Lady George, who shared the cabman's

views on this point, but to the infinite joy of Chrissie, who had been brought up in a street of frequent fighting, not always between men, and therefore was a pacifist. Her prayer was that neither man should be hurt—Tony because she loved him, and Teddy because he had been very kind. Her admiration of Tony went up to the highest notch at his grace, deftness, good humour, patience, and above all, at his refusal to put a stop to the whole thing by laying Teddy out.

Egged on by the cab-driver and by an increasing sense of humiliation at his complete inability to get in a single blow at Tony's vulnerable parts, it is probable that Sherwood, going, as Chrissie called it, mad, eventually would have attacked with his knife if he had not skidded suddenly on the wet road, lost his feet, and come down with a crash with his head on the edge of the curbstone. There he lay, stunned a pitiable object, poor little devil.

"Oh, damn," said Tony. "What a rotten shame. I was awfully afraid he might do that. Now we must take him home and put him to bed. Lady George, be an angel and drive us there. I haven't a bean for another taxi, even if there were one to be found."

Without waiting for permission, he picked the unconscious man out of the gutter and was about to carry him to the cab when a silent-footed policeman snooked round the corner, increased his pace, and stalked into the middle of the group.

"Nar then. What's all this 'ere?" He loomed largely under the light of the lamp-post.

"When our strenuous hygienic brigades wash the streets," said Tony, always ready, "why don't they dry them again? As you see, there's been a nasty

accident to a member of Lady George Cornish's party, and if you happen to know to whom to send the doctor's bill I wish you'd give me the name."

"Oh, it's *you*," said the policeman, giving Tony a dry half-smile. He had not immediately recognized him in his fantastic clothes.

"Yes. How are you, my dear fellow?"

"Fair ter middlin'. No complaints. But as it's you, I'll have to ask the lidy for a bit of explanation." He jerked his thumb at Teddy Sherwood's limp form and dangling arm.

Immediately adopting an air of aggressive pomposity Lady George stepped forward. Oh dear, oh dear, this was exactly what she had wanted most to avoid. "What Mr. Stirling Fortescue has told you is perfectly true, constable. On our way from Covent Garden Opera House"

But the policeman completely ignored her tumbling words. His eye had been attracted to Chrissie's golden head and well-known figure, of which he now saw a good deal more than he had ever seen before. He saluted with an air of respectful friendliness. "I'll 'ave it from you, Miss Chrissie. Anything that you says goes," he said, "and I'm glad to see you lookin' so bonny, I'm sure."

It was part of his duty to drop into the Coliseum every night during the performance. He was a married man and fairly happy, but he had been heard to say, in and out of uniform, as his highest tribute to the genius of the twins: "Well, I don't care 'oo knows it, but either of them little gals can 'ave *me*." He had worn a black armlet for Sissie for a fortnight.

With one of the heavenly smiles that she had practised so assiduously for her audience, Chrissie

spoke at once, in simple, sisterly words. "That's very kind," she said. "But there ain't nothing for you to trouble about here. I give you my word. You can see how wet the street is. Mr. Sherwood was prancin' about in one of his mad moods and down 'e goes and catches his head on the curb. What we want ter do is to put him in the cab and drive him home to bed."

The policeman was perfectly satisfied, in spite of the presence of that there roystering young shaver. Chrissie and the Bank of England—he believed in both. "Right you are, Missie," he said, and opened the door of the cab. "In 'e goes."

In he went, quickly and deftly, as it was Tony's way to do things. "Forgive my getting in before you, Lady George. I must hold up poor old Teddy."

"That's the idea. Can't be'ave with style in an accident. Now, Lidy."

So infinitely relieved at her rescue from Bow Street that her dignity mattered nothing at all, Lady George obeyed the order with a sort of purr.

But as Chrissie was about to follow the policeman touched her arm. "Pardon me," he said in a low and warning voice. "Is that young feller a pal of yours?" He indicated the bland and smiling Tony with a slant of the head.

"My best pal," answered Chrissie.

"Oh, well then, there aint nothing I can say."

"Nothing," she said, and held out her hand with one more footlight smile.

The policeman grasped it eagerly and squeezed it much too hard. He put into that grip the very deep sympathy that he felt for the loss of her sister.

"Thank you, Jack," said Chrissie, taking a chance at his name.

"Who says I don't know a mascot when I see one?" said Tony to himself as the cab moved off.

IV

It was an uncle of his, a man who had devoted a sufficiently wealthy leisure to the study of animal life, who, in talking about the much discussed Tony Fortescue, had come to the conclusion that he was one of the inevitable products of a too long peace. And when called upon to justify this alarming description by the fellow members of the Carlton Club who stood for heredity and pointed to Tony's Cromwellian father, he laughed and said that almost any man could be Cromwellian who had no temptations to be anything else. The Earl of Stirling, he pointed out, had had the great advantage of finding himself in the world during the middle reign of Queen Victoria, when, he said, it was the fashion to behave oneself, walk the straight and narrow path, and carry the traditions of a gentleman with one even when it was pleasant to break the dull routine by a carefully conducted excursion into forbidden places. "Then, too," he said, "you must remember that my brother came into the title at an early age, was the possessor of an income large enough to permit him to indulge his hobbies without the need of going to the money-lenders, spent the greater part of his youth on the moors and in the trout streams of the old place in Scotland, so that he was able to wear down his exuberant vitality in a hard climate by strenuous

exercise, and then was married before he was thirty to a healthy, normal, and beautiful woman who was at his side in the open air until her various domestic events compelled her to retire to the nuptial chamber, out of which she reappeared with an alacrity that held his love and won his great respect and admiration. Under such conditions, my dear fellow," he went on, "a man would have had to be a degenerate to have broken away from a most agreeable and easy rectitude and indulged in the process of touching pitch with a hand so strong and sunburnt. It is money, a home one loves, and a wife who keeps herself beautiful that enable the ordinary man to become Cromwellian. Nothing else. Under the same sad and extremely difficult influences that affected Tony's boyhood and the changed times in which he went to school, it is more than probable that my brother would have been a very different man—not, perhaps, as wild as this boy, he lacks the homogeneity, but certainly not a credit to his class. You don't agree with me? Well, then, let's put young Tony under a magnifying glass and study causes. They always tell. Here was a child who formed the tail of a rather long kite—a sort of St. Martin's summer child, born ten years after the process of child-bearing had come apparently to an end. In itself that plunged the house which had settled down to a nursery-like routine into a sort of belated chaos, somewhat irritably resented by the father. Add to this the sudden invalidism of the hitherto splendidly healthy mother which led in a year to her death, and you can see that even before Tony could speak, and he *can* speak, he was already a dog with a bad name, ripe for the gallows. Without his wife my brother was a miserable

wretch who had indeed lost his better half, and it was natural, I suppose, that he should look at the last of his children as the cause of his loneliness. It would not be true to say that he resented or detested poor Tony, but I know, from having watched the whole thing, it would be true to say that he started off in the wrong mood towards the boy and paid him out, so to speak, for having brought about a new way of life. To this my brother, the most conservative of men, never could accustom himself. Everything the boy did was wrong, therefore, almost before he had done it. The hereditary influences which had turned out the other children in the modern Stirling mould jumped back, for an unaccountable reason, to the Stirling mould of the old fighting chieftain times of Scotland—which is all the more difficult to explain because the boy was born to a father and mother in the most settled and conventional period of their lives at a time in the history of the country just before the utterly unnecessary scrap in South Africa had led to the use of arms. The fact remains, however, that, environment notwithstanding, this lad was recognizably one of the so-called bad rather than one of the obviously good Stirlings. From the very first the little beggar looked for trouble, fought with his nurse, invented the most extraordinary forms of mischief, was temperamentally incapable of accepting discipline, and although he was endowed with the great gift of leadership invariably used it to cause a riot both at home and at school. Charm, a most disarming personality and great good looks made his water a little less hot than he deserved after most of his escapades, but an example had to be made at Eton, and he was returned with

care. His funeral at Oxford was a most elaborate business after a career during which every law of the University was broken ; but this time, perhaps because the former fatted calf was not to his liking, the prodigal son didn't go home. He came to London—and you know the rest. At the age of twenty-three he has already achieved the doubtful distinction of being referred to in the newspapers under the heading of 'Fortescue again.' All the same, my nephew is neither a degenerate nor a criminal. He is simply a throwback born to an unromantic age. Give him a maiden in distress to rescue and he will rival Don Quixote, and if he has not killed himself in a motor accident or had his throat cut in Soho before Germany plunges Europe into war, he will find himself and give proof that he is as much a Stirling as his forbears were with all their fighting qualities. What if Germany doesn't declare war, you say? She will. Go there to-morrow and you will see that all her plans are like the set pieces of a firework display, waiting only for the match."

A wise kind man, this, who had twice given Tony a crinkling bank note.

V

Sherwood's rooms in Mount Street were above the offices of a well-known firm of house agents.

Dawn had broken and a cold light had brought out the outline of the houses, but not even the earliest of the working ants of the sprawling city. The street was deserted as the cab stopped. The breeze which came in from the country had brought with it the

faint aroma of the awakening earth, the intangible scent of unlocked flowers. Chrissie caught it, drew in a long breath, and gave great thanks for the new life which Tony had led her into.

With his unoccupied hand he had held one of hers during the journey from York Street. The other had been round the inanimate Sherwood, whose head had been resting on his shoulder with ironic affection.

"If it's all the same to you, I won't get out," said Lady George, who had never ceased to talk. "I'm a bit shaken after all this 'ere excitement. And Lumley's just about to come unglued. Chrissie had better come along 'ome with us, 'ave a nice 'ot bath, sleep till five o'clock in the afternoon, and send someone for her clothes."

But in answer to Tony's inquiring look the little golden head was shaken in violent protest.

"That's very charming of you," said Tony. "The only thing is I think it will be necessary for Chrissie's tender fingers to make a bandage for poor old Teddie. I'm rather lost when it comes to that. What do you think?"

"I'm past thinkin'," said Lady George, with an immense and irrepressible yawn. "All I ask is that you'll do what you're goin' ter do without talkin' about it, and let me go on to hit the sheets. I'm absoballylootly all in."

"No wonder," said Tony sympathetically. "Give me time to hunt Teddy over for his latch-keys and to thank you a thousand times for bringing us here, and we'll keep you no longer. Ah, here they are, neatly on a ring. Major, I wonder if I may trouble you. . . ."

"No," said Chrissie, "let me have 'em." In an

instant she was out of the cab, standing in her startling whiteness at the side of the open door. The other key belonged to the flat on the first floor.

Before the cab was half-way up the street the still unconscious Sherwood was lying on the sofa in his sitting room, Chrissie was in the bath room wetting a towel, and Tony was opening a sideboard in which he knew that brandy was to be found. He was one of those ubiquitous men who have the gift of making themselves completely at home in other people's houses, and, in order to save trouble by not asking for what they want, make themselves instantly acquainted with geographical arrangements and help themselves.

"Curbstones are rotten things to hit," he said cheerfully, administering a dose. "Now the towel, Chris, and I don't think it will be many minutes before our patient will be babbling again." He stood back and watched the girl's deft and delicate fingers with admiring eyes. He knew where *he* would be if war came at last, and it was easy to guess where Chrissie would be found, cool, capable, and with an angelic smile that would be as valuable in the hospital ward as the surgeon's knife on gun-fodder. War! The gods

And while she took off Sherwood's collar and undid his shirt, Tony went in search of the man who had such extraordinary gifts with a frying-pan.

It was a well-arranged bachelor flat. There were a large and airy sitting-room, a large enough dining-room, two bedrooms, a small kitchen, and plenty of cupboards. Sherwood's ideas as to furniture and decorations were, however, devoid of originality. It was obvious that he had spent about half an hour

in one of the Tottenham Court Road shops in which everything still smelt of varnish and had ordered one of this, three of that, two of the other, until his list had been worked off. His carpets and curtains had come from the same establishment, and probably his pictures as well. They were all honest, safe, and appalling. There was, therefore, nothing charming about the place. It might easily have been, indeed, a suite of rooms in a hotel at one of the tripper-run seaside resorts. It was, nevertheless, characteristically Sherwood, and off the peg, like his clothes. It seemed to shout the fact that it was penny plain, and if you don't like it don't stay. It announced itself, rather blatantly, as the antithesis of so many of London's bachelors' rooms which, with their old pieces, delicate curtains, many cushions and a thousand and one delightful dinks looked as though they might belong to artistic women.

Tony had no fault to find. He had stayed there for weeks at a time, and when he had not won Teddy's bed with a flick of a coin, had enjoyed many delicious sleeps on the sofa in the sitting room. He had taken so great a liking to the flat that it had been somewhat difficult to disgorge him on several occasions. He was an affectionate visitor.

The man, an Italian from the fact that his long black hair was fanned out dryly all over his pillow, and an ex-waiter by the existence of the white dicky which hung by its collar from one of the bed posts, was profoundly and noiselessly asleep. It would not have been surprising if he had confessed that he had come suddenly to life and escaped from one of Gozzoli's frescoes in the Chapel of the de Medici Palace, and then had emerged from the beetle ridden

kitchen of a Soho restaurant to live in the comparative luxury of Mount Street..

Tony hated to disturb him. All the same he was anxious that Chrissie should have something to eat and a cup of hot coffee to drive out the morning chill. She was recklessly without clothing. He, too, felt acutely the need of both, and, after all, as luck would have it, it was part of Beppo's business to be disturbed.

The deed performed, the order given, but the room not left until the half dressed man was safely in his trousers, Tony returned in the highest spirits to the sitting room.

He was received with an angry glare from the sitting Sherwood and a question as to what the devil he was doing there.

"Oh, splendid work," said Tony warmly. "Congratulations, old boy. You have the constitution of an ox."

"And you have the hide of a rhinoceros," said Teddy.

"And the cursed impertinence of a tax collector. Say it, why don't you? It will clear the air and leave us with nothing but the future to discuss." And then, without the usual laughter lines about his eyes, he went up to Teddy and put an arm affectionately round his shoulder. "So far as the past goes, old man, I want you to know that I'm frightfully sick at the way I went back on you to-night. No, listen, because this has got to be cleared up before we go on to the next step. You know how deeply I value your friendship, and how grateful I am to you for all you've done for me. Hear me out, Teddy, old thing, please. ("My word," thought Chrissie, "he talks like a book," and she put her hand

on Teddy's throbbing head to soothe him out of interruption. Teddy would willingly have been half dead for less than that.) You see, I've been dying to meet Chrissie ever since the night that you and I cheered the roof off at the Coliseum. And when you introduced us to-night at the C.G.B., I went nutty, old boy, balmy, dippy, prehistoric, and all those hours fled away like a minute. I swear they did, and it was only when Chrissie caved in that I remembered what I'd done. No, don't blaze out and work yourself up all over again. You'll only make your poor old cocoanut thump and undo all our work. I can't do more than offer you my humble apologies, and ask you to accept my assurance that I'm damned ashamed." His curious mixture of slang and pedanticism only added, somehow, to his earnestness and sincerity.

"Gas! Gas!" cried Teddy. "You don't mean a word of it. You're the King of Kidders. I know *you*."

"Oh, Teddy!" said Chrissie, to whom such remarks seemed almost blasphemy. If this wasn't a bloomin' gent, she'd like to know who was!

And then the man whose pride had been far more injured than his body turned on the girl whom he loved altogether beyond the power of words. "Oh, so you're the latest, are you? You're the new one to kneel down and kiss the boots of this damned humbug. You're all the same, the lot of you. You put up barbed wire and virtuous notices against the decent people you come across, but let a wily skunk sneak in with a moving picture profile and down go your defences and you hand yourselves away. God, it makes me sick!"

The smooth-footed presence of Beppo with a table cloth brought the argument to a stop for the moment. Accustomed to seeing strange people in that room at all hours of the day and night, his child-like expressive face showed no surprise at the sight of a girl in the costume of the ballet and the familiar Tony in the decadent garments of a Dulac illustration. Nor was he in the smallest degree upset because his master's head was bandaged. It all belonged to what he called life, and it appealed to the natural passion for dramatics that plays so strong a part in Italian psychology.

As soon as he was out of the room the ball was in play again, this time in Chrissie's hands.

"I don't know what you mean by all that, Teddy," she said quietly, "and it don't seem to me to be any use to make another scene. It's very simple—all of it. I'm just as sorry as Tony is for spoilin' your evening, but it's as much my fault as it is his. All those hours were like a minute to me too, because just the same thing happened to me as happened to him."

"I know that. You're only telling me what I told you."

"Yes," replied Chrissie, watching every word with the greatest care in order to try and live up to Tony's wonderful flow. "But with this difference."

"What difference?"

"You think Tony went nutty about me as he's been nutty about other girls."

"So would you if you knew anything about him."

"No. You're wrong there too. You won't let yourself understand what I mean when I say that this was meant."

"Meant?" the word completely floored him.

"Yes. It was marked out to come, and it would have come just the same if I hadn't gone with you to the ball. Tony and I had to meet to-night, we *had* to, and we should have done it at the corner of a street, in a chemist's shop, any old place."

Sherwood shot out a scornful and incredulous guffaw.

"And having met"—a rising emotion put her off her grammatical guard—"We're not goin' to cut loose again never in our lives. See? It's me and him against the bloomin' world!"

She left her nurse's place at the head of the sofa, and with a dignity and finality that proved to poor old Teddy that his hopes were dead, placed her head on Tony's chest and closed her eyes in peace.

And Tony held her tight, not with passion but with a settled love. "That's true," he said, "so help me God."

But they knew very little of Teddy Sherwood's tenacious nature if they imagined that they had brought the struggle to an end. He intended to fight for Chrissie as he had fought for revenge, and if necessary to cut this knot with his knife.

"How touching," he said, with a rather feeble attempt at sarcasm. "If I had a camera handy you'd make a beautiful photograph of love's young dream. But unless Tony's the monkey the managers asked you to find, how do you think you're going to set up a house for your domestic bliss? Is he going to pinch one when nobody's looking, or are you both coming to live on me?"

The entrance of Beppo again. He carried a large tray of cups and plates, and spoilt the effect of the

heavy insults with which Sherwood had hoped to draw blood. It is more than probable that he would have been rewarded, instead, with a smile. There was genuine humour in the last suggestion.

As it was Chrissie drifted to the window over which the blinds were drawn, and Tony strolled casually to the table on which there was the familiar cigarette box.

"And as to all this fatalistic muck that you're trying to hide behind," continued the unscientific fighter as soon as Beppo had gone, "it doesn't go down with me. If you were frank and were to tell me that you were mesmerized I might believe you, Chrissie. That blighter mesmerized me often enough for money and food and roof. And if you were to say that you're going to stop going straight because of the suffering you've had and chuck yourself away on any woman's man in a violent reaction, I might even believe you there. But this piffle about 'having to meet' and being together against the world What do you take me for?"

"These cigarettes are a little too dry, old boy," said Tony, endeavouring to change a perfectly useless conversation. "There's a little man in Jermyn Street"

"Oh shut up," cried Teddy. "You're not going to put me off like that. You may not know it, and it wouldn't matter to you if you did, but Chrissie's *my* friend. I've been her slave and bottle-washer for the last six months, and you're not going to get away with this high handed commandeering as lightly as you think. It's all in a day's work to you, this sort of thing. You've only to bat your eye at a woman to take her from any man she's with. But I'm going to fight to save Chrissie from you as long

as there's one damn bit of truth left in me. She's worth it."

"I agree with you there," said Tony. "Fight to the last gasp. I like you for it."

Sherwood sat up straight, swung round, and put his feet on the floor. The towel had slipped a little over his left eye. His collarless shirt from which the studs had been taken gaped as dress shirts will. He cut a strange figure in that prosaic room. "I love this girl," he cried out, with a depth of feeling that made his voice unsteady. "I'd sell my soul for her. Unlike you, who will drop her in a week, I've asked her to be my wife, over and over again. And unlike you, who live by the skin of your teeth, I'm in a position to make her happy and comfortable, give her a house in the country if she'd like it, with a car and a maid and dogs to walk with, and settle the business on her to win a smile. Have you asked her to be *your* wife? Have you? You bet you haven't. You think that just because you call yourself the Honourable Anthony Stirling Fortescue, and precious few people believe you are, that you can take what you want and ride loftily over all the rest of us. But if, before Chrissie goes any further, she'd take the trouble to look up your record at Bow Street, she'd probably find that you're as common a man as I am and without as honest a father. I ask her to do it, that's all. I ask her to remain uncharmed long enough to make inquiries, to be the hands off Chrissie to you that she's always been to me. That's fair, and I deserve that. Don't I? Come, don't I? both of you?" And he flung out his arms in a sort of pathetic appeal, unaware of the fact that tears were streaming down his face. And then taking

advantage of Tony's utter speechlessness, he sprang to his feet, went unsteadily to Chrissie and seized her by the wrist. "Own up, go on, own up. You haven't any more true idea who this man is than I have, have you? And he hasn't asked you to be his wife and has never come anywhere near it, has he? Say it. Say it."

"No, he hasn't," said Chrissie quietly. "And I never expected him to."

"What . . . You never expected him to? You—who have been through all the cities with verboten on your back?"

"This is different, Teddy," she said. "I've tried to tell you so."

Sherwood was not a man of loose ideas although he had chosen to live among people who regarded morals as out of date. He believed in marriage. He had a hard word for women who went in for free love. And for Chrissie to fall from her pedestal—Chrissie, who, for all her beauty, had slipped through the sordid streets, semi-starvation, and the utter carelessness of the stage, who had refused to marry *him* . . .

"He's poisoned you," he cried in horror. "You good-looking irresistible devil, you've poisoned her." And with the utmost detestation he turned to Tony, once more tried to hit him in the face, caught an uncertain foot in the carpet and lurched into his arms.

VI

And when Bepko had arranged his famous scrambled eggs on the table, he threw up the blinds, drew back the curtains, and switched off the electric light.

By the constant sound of a high pitched voice, the presence of the bandage, the sudden silences when he had appeared he knew that there was drama in the sitting room. "Life" as he thought of it. "*Christo Sancta Dio*, life!" Teddy Sherwood had reached the advanced age of twenty-four, Tony was older than Regent Street at twenty-three, and Chrissie was as old as Fulham itself at her hard won eighteen years But when food appeared, and such food too, that was the time for the pause. Hence daylight, the announcement, the bow, the flamboyant exit behind the scenes.

In the cold grey light of that April morning, Chrissie's ballet skirt and Tony's queer many coloured clothes became more bizarre than ever. They gave these two the appearance of belonging to a circus which had drawn up its pegs, packed its tents into caravans, faded away into the early mist, and left them high and dry.

The delicate colouring of Chrissie's face had also faded away. It was now almost as white as the breast of a dove. The strain through which she had been had made her limp and tired, but it had not succeeded in taking out of her eyes the glory of new life, the joy of first love. She had never been later in bed than twelve o'clock before.

It was the sudden change from artificial light to that of truth and sanity that brought Sherwood down from a high fever of feeling to a flat sub-normal. He accepted his position on the sofa to which Tony had supported him and lay stretched out with both hands over his face. Luck, of which he heard so much among the adventurers of his acquaintance, had gone dead against him.

And then Tony began to speak. "Teddy, old man," he said, very simply and quietly, "I didn't know that you felt about Chrissie like this. I didn't know how long you've been round with her or that you'd asked her to be your wife. It would have made a great deal of difference in my behaviour last night, I assure you, but none at all in the way things have gone. I can't explain to you the fact that it was meant to come like this in any better words than Chrissie has used. I can only say that, but for our meeting through you, she wouldn't be alive at this moment. Ah, that makes you take on a kinder expression, doesn't it? And as to your idea that she shall look me up and prove me to be who I am—all right, I agree. She won't find that I'm the damned good fellow that you are, worse luck, but she will find that my father's as honest as yours was. Jot the name down, Chrissie, and the address. It's Stirling, the Earl of Stirling, 320 Grosvenor Square. Of all men living he can tell you the worst of me, and will. Stirling—it's a good name, and a good word. But somehow, when I was born, they forgot to put in the gold. And as to your charge that I haven't asked Chrissie to marry me, that's true, old man. I took it that that went without saying where such a girl as she is concerned. But so that you shall have the satisfaction of knowing that I intend to play the game this time, as you would in the same circumstances, and it couldn't be played better than that, I now beg Chrissie—" he rose and stood in front of her, still very simple and quiet—"to do me the honour to become my wife, and take the only thing I've got to give her—my everlasting love."

(“ Oh, didn’t I *say* he was the only bloomin’ gent I’ve ever struck ? ”)

And with his hands still over his face, afraid to look, in utter despair, Teddy Sherwood heard a little cry, a little rush, and a kiss that he would have given his soul to win.

PART II
AFTER THE WAR

I

THE officer who rose to his feet as the waiters left the room was a Squadron Commander in the Royal Air Force. He was a man of about thirty-eight wearing a line of ribbons, and his round face was still boyish in spite of his long service and many wounds. Although he had been an actor before the War, well known in London for the portrayal of those brusque, precocious and argumentative young-old men whom Shaw had found so useful in the application of his irrepressible ideas, it was obvious to all his brother officers that he welcomed the opportunity to steady his voice which was afforded by a volley of cheering. It was an emotional occasion and the fact could not be hidden even by the most case-hardened flying man among the large body of diners. They were, in fact, wearing uniform for the last time that night.

He took off his wrist watch and put it on the table in front of him. He pushed his half-empty glass back, and herded together a collection of walnut shells with a hand that insisted on trembling. Then, with his chin tilted at a rather aggressive angle, and one side of his mouth twisted into a nervous smile, he waited for silence with that affectation of slight surprise which had become familiar to his admiring audiences in the far off days of peace. With a few differences in his uniform he might have been "Bluntschli" in "Arms and the Man" again.

"Gentlemen," he said finally in a loud and resonant voice. "This, then, is the end. I don't mean of

the War, which we were not permitted to finish owing to the craving of the politicians to get into the limelight. But for us. Our day is over. We are out. From to-night we join the ranks of the swelling army of the unemployed. Those few of us who have been practising every known trick since the Armistice in order to get out of uniform may thank whichever they like of the numerous gods that have been dragged into this scrap. The others, and among them I, are going to leave the service that we have done our best to bring to efficiency without the slightest joy."

There was a sharp burst of applause.

He glanced all about him with an eye trained to read the faces of the people out in front. In this case they were, for the most part, young faces, those of beardless boys, but on them all were stamped the lines of physical strain, here and there of great suffering, and here and there of fear. Every eye was focused upon the speaker, every head strained forward. Silence followed the almost unanimous approval of his statement like the letting down of a shutter.

"Why? I ask this in order to set out my reasons. There are two, and both of them are good. First, because we fail to be impressed with the pathetic idea that this has been a war to end war; that we should be scrapped in the general scrapping as a force whose usefulness is ended now that the world has emerged from bloodshed into a period of peace on earth and mercy mild. We have, we take the liberty of believing, longer sight than those bespectacled idealists, those anaemic intellectuals who are weeping tears of joy over the sudden universal brotherhood of lately warring nations. We are crudely practical

enough to think, putting it in the least offensive words, that of all the forces built up during the War, ours is the one that it is a damn sin and a criminal waste to dissolve."

Another outburst held him up for a moment, and during this the sudden rush of colour that had mounted to his low broad forehead faded slowly out.

"The next war will be fought in the air, as well we know, and when the late war is far from over and is likely to be continued for many years—politicians having taken things into their well-known muddling hands—we regard with trepidation, mixed with grief and anger, the wholesale demolition of the squadrons to which we have been attached in both the senses of that word. I say, and I don't mind who the devil hears me, that quite apart from the fact that the majority of us have been rendered useless for any other occupation because our education had to be sacrificed to the job we had in hand, the R.A.F. should be kept intact. It may not be needed to-day, to-morrow, or at the end of the year. All the same it will be needed if England is not to find herself at the mercy of a less Utopian and a longer-sighted power."

Again the loud volley. Someone shouted "Will they get us next time?" and there was a stentorian "No."

The Squadron Commander's mobile face went into an ironical grin. "Oh yes they will," he said. "You may bet your boots on that. They'll always get us, wherever we may be. But shall we be any use to 'em then, having gone soft and slack? Shall we be able to hold our tails up when we've been left behind in the competition of machines that's going

on even now? That's what you had better shout 'No' to if you want to shout again."

And the "No" came like the discharge of a gun.

"Flying, as we know it to-day," he added, "is a kid's game to what it will become by the time the world's at loggerheads again. In fact as we sit here to-night, not many months after the Armistice, new inventions are being carried out which already make us look like a flock of tame canaries." He threw this into the room with a break in his voice and a kind of anger before steadying up and continuing his speech.

"The second of my reasons for stating that we face demobilization with sinking hearts is personal. It is, however, almost equally grave, and it affects every one of us in exactly the same degree. Flung into the street to-morrow, what are we going to do? Are we, like so many of the men who have shaken off mud and blood and crawled out of the trenches, to throw ourselves angrily on the country and demand to know what it is going to do for us—cry out that we are some of those who prevented the enemy from spoiling our homes and ask to be kept in return? Or what? How are we going to live? How are we going to keep our heads above water? As expert flying men, most of us dragged out of school before we had the chance to finish with books, the rest looking round to see the jobs we occupied before we joined up now filled by other men, what are we fitted for? The only one of us, so far as I can find out, who has received an offer of work is a Wing Commander whom we love passing the love of a brother—I mean Stirling Fortescue, the greatest officer and the best fellow . . ."

Tony's lips went tight and his eyes glinted as every man in that room sprang to his feet and yelled. It was a roar that must have been heard as far away as Charing Cross, and as it went on and on like the heavy waters of a cataract he hoped that it might float into the window of the rooms in the Haymarket into which he had installed Chrissie that afternoon.

"And you will be duly impressed and full of congratulations when I tell you that he has been given the opportunity, so exactly fitted to his worth and services to his country, of playing the cornet in an officer's street band."

The heavy sarcasm of this announcement fell with a thud and an involuntary groan rose up.

There was a moment of utter silence during which it was seen that the Squadron Commander was making a great struggle to be able to speak his final words without breaking down under his deep emotion.

"Gentlemen of the Royal Air Force, which dies to-night in this room, I hope to God with everything that may be decent in my soul, that we shall never forget each other or the service to which we belonged. We are out, over and up against it. One fight is ended and another begins. We shall do our damndest, each one of us, to play the game as befits the uniform that we discard to-night. If we have the luck to find a new job, whatever it may be, let's work as we have always worked. And if we have to starve until something comes along, let's starve in the manner of the R.A.F. Tony will play the cornet like a gentleman, I shall hang about the old stage doors with my chin tilted, and you, I know it, will keep your tails up through thick and thin."

And then, with a dead white face, he stood at

attention, with shoulders squared, and in a voice that was almost out of control, began to sing the first bar of the National Anthem. On their feet, in a like manner, every man present gave voice most faithfully.

II

"It's not true that you're going to play the cornet in the street, is it?"

Tony turned at the abrupt question. Disliking funerals, post-mortems and long drawn-out good-byes, he had been the first man to hurry from the room and the restaurant. It was Sherwood who followed him into Shaftesbury Avenue and tapped him sharply on the arm.

"Oh, hullo Teddy," he sang out, flashing the well-known smile. "How goes it, old son?"

"That doesn't matter. I want an answer to my question."

"Of course it's true," said Tony. "And if I hadn't learned to play the good old cornet while I was hangin' about the hospital in '17, I should now be signing on with a little gang of burglars who are very good friends of mine. As a single man I should have enjoyed that sort of outdoor sport enormously, but, y'see, Chrissie's been brought up on rather narrow lines, and so" He waved the thing away with a half regretful eloquence.

An expression of horror spread over Sherwood's ill-assorted features, and the ugly scar on his left cheek bone, an everlasting memento of Contalmaison, turned a dull red. As the man who had, as he

considered, stolen Chrissie he hated Tony in the self-punishing manner of a religious fanatic who makes an all day long ecstasy of his detestation of the devil. As the officer under whom he had served for several years, he admired and respected him for his humanity and imagination, efficiency and courage to the extent of hero-worship. Regarding him at that moment, as he had had no difficulty in doing while on active service, not as Tony the pre-war rotter, the loose fish and glib cadger of peace times, but as Wing Commander Stirling Fortescue, the finest officer in the R.A.F., he was shocked and appalled at the idea of his falling from his dizzy height to the ignominy of a street musician.

"Look here," he said, trying to keep his place at Tony's side as they dodged through the people who poured out of the theatres into Piccadilly Circus, "I can't stand it. There must be something else that you can do."

"What, for instance, with Army, Navy, and Air Force all lined up for jobs?" Quaint old thing, Teddy. What, after all, did it matter to him?

"Can't you go to the Earl of Stirling and get him to wangle you something?"

Tony laughed. "My dear old man, my brother, like my father before him, is a most exemplary person. He wouldn't touch me with the end of a six-foot pole."

"Why? Doesn't he know your record in the R.A.F.?"

The question was not answered. Tony's attention was drawn away from Sherwood's nagging cross-examination by a sight that stopped his heart. Tilted against a wall like a sack of potatoes was an

ex-soldier without his arms and legs. A greasy cap gaped hungrily at passers-by, and two arresting eyes in a young and well-cut face asked with bitter sarcasm for charity. Tony's silver coin, but better still his quick salute, won a smile of gratitude that must have made the pen of the recording angel tremble in her hand.

Sherwood's aim was bad. His coin hit the wall and rolled among the feet of hurrying people. A woman stopped it, picked it up, and having seen the actions of the two officers, dropped it in the cap, adding sixpence of her own. The incident came under the notice of others, one or two of whom, with a certain sheepishness, followed the example of the woman who had held them up by her sudden scramble. The rest, casting a callous glance at what had long become a familiar and even tiresome sight, passed on.

Tony cleared his throat. "Who puts him there and takes him home? A Chrissie, do you suppose?" He drew up at the edge of the pavement—was held up rather, because a long line of cars and taxicabs swept into the Circus along their various tides. Peace and business as usual. Not longer than eight months ago the now gleaming lights in Piccadilly and Regent Street had been dead and almost forgotten, while on unexpected roofs searchlights stood ready to send their long straight shafts into the sky to pick up enemy air-craft. Round the corner at Charing Cross the Continental trains had dumped woundeds into a depressed and darkened London: brought in and taken back men on thirty-six hours leave from those detested shambles. But now heroes had gone out of fashion with the Armistice. Dance, you who have the coin and the legs. Come to Ciro's where there's

jazz. Let the lights blaze and the corks pop, and the girls flash their nakedness. Let the old familiar spell-binders dodge and trick and scramble for new frontiers. Forget the bloody war and mud-stained uniforms. This is peace. Lloyd George will have the Kaiser in a cage. Pleasure and business as usual.

The dogged and persistent Sherwood stuck to Chrissie's husband like a leech. "All right, then," he said, jabbing Tony's arm again to compel his wandering attention. "Just listen, will you? I've got a scheme that'll take you off the streets."

"Good old Teddy! What's the brainy idea?" Remarkable this excellent little fellow's loyalty and friendship.

"I'll make a place for you in the advertising department of my head office and pay you five hundred a year. How's that?"

A policeman held up the traffic and the two men were carried across the street by a crowd eager to get home by bus and tube and taxi. Separated in the rush Tony waited to be rejoined by his Sancho Panza on the threshold of the Criterion Theatre, where there were still a number of theatre-goers waiting impatiently for cabs. He knew them for men who had escaped from the recent holocaust and with the wives and sisters of their kind were revelling in the surprise and exhilaration of being alive. In spite of his solid foundation of selfishness and the habit of expecting everything for nothing that was characteristic of his type, he was touched by Sherwood's offer. Better than anyone he knew the generosity which had prompted it. During all the years of their mutual nearness to death he had never forgotten the sight of Sherwood's tear-stained face

in his rooms in Mount Street after that night at the Covent Garden ball. This, as well as the stolid reliability and undramatic courage of Teddy Sherwood as his subordinate officer, was a glorious revenge for his having stolen Chrissie, he told himself.

"My God, Teddy," he said, putting his arm round Sherwood's muscular shoulders in his winning way, "what the dickens can I say to that?"

"Nothing. Just take the job and carry on. That's all you're asked to do."

He didn't want to be fussed over by this man. Nor did he want to be touched, which made him shudder. In making this offer he was not attempting to do something in a roundabout way for Chrissie, who was always in his thoughts—deeply, wholly and rather terribly loved. His one desire was to put his late chief into dignified work on a living wage as a tribute to his gallantry. That was all. And having done that he could continue to hate with all his curious soul as he was damned well going to do.

All this was perfectly clear to Tony. His uncanny knowledge of human nature, greatly enhanced by his close association with so many men under the primeval influences of war, made it easy for him to see the workings of Teddy Sherwood's elemental mind. Being in uniform and not yet having fallen back into his pre-war carelessness, the self-respect that he had acquired offered a barrier against the acceptance of what was obviously a charitable act. If he had lost his arms and legs like that poor devil propped against the wall, he would, with Chrissie to keep, have been forced thankfully to live on Sherwood's coins. As it was his luck had held, and he was sound in wind and limb. What might happen in

the future to weaken his war-acquired morale who could tell. In his present mood he shied at the idea of taking Sherwood's money home to pay for Chrissie's bread. He would do that job himself and start the new life clean.

So he said, "It's foolish for me to attempt to thank you for what you want to do. But you know me. I could no more knuckle down to the pent-up routine of an office than be a parson. Your manager would give me the order of the boot before the end of my first week. Besides, I'm signed up to the joker who runs the band, and I'm to join up to-morrow. So there it is."

"You mean that?"

"Yes, old boy, I mean it, though I'm enormously grateful to you for your kindness."

"You prefer to blow a cursed cornet and rattle a box in the face of people who want to forget the War to honest work in a decent office? *You?*" He was not thinking of the tall, slight, graceful man in front of him as the son of an Earl when he shot out this shrill incredulous question, but as Wing Commander Stirling Fortescue whose deplorable career had been brought to an end by a war for which he had been born; who had been raised out of the gutter and put on his feet by the kind of work for which he had had the same vocation as writing is to some men; the Church, surgery, or discovering the South Pole to others, who couldn't have been so excellent in the air if he had been any good on earth.

"Oddly enough, I do," said Tony. "Thanks very much all the same."

"God Almighty," cried Sherwood, and then after a pause during which he found it utterly impossible

to find words suitable to express his disgust, irritation, and grief, flung up his hands, turned on his heels, and dived into the crowd headfirst.

III

Whereupon, eager to join up again with Chrissie, from whom, except for occasional week-ends, he had been separated during the period of the War, Tony turned his face towards—where? Home? That hardly seemed the right word for those two dingy little rooms that he had taken that morning in the shabbiest of the houses in Panton Street—rooms which once had belonged to a young actor whose last part had been finely played in the forward sweep of the Allied armies, and which were furnished with an odd assortment of bits and pieces resulting from his various engagements upon the London stage. They were, however, the best that Tony could afford, having saved no more than fifty pounds from his pay, and he was thankful to have found them unoccupied. How long he would be able to hold them on what he might earn as a performer on the cursed cornet was the new problem to be faced. The old optimism which had carried him through the daily adventure of pre-war times still bubbled in his veins, and the Micawber spirit of waiting hopefully for something to turn up was more alive in him than ever. He was not worried about Chrissie. He never worried about Chrissie. He knew her for a sportsman. He knew with what amazing courage and gorgeous cheerfulness she was able to accept whatever came her way. If she couldn't snow white she would

snow brown as she had always done. She had a genius for making the best of things, for showing no surprise at the inevitable. Hadn't she made their bed-sitting room in Brewer Street gleam with cleanliness—even beauty—while he had waited so eagerly for the war? Hadn't she given the desire to live to hundreds of her woundeds, and been known as "Wendy" wherever there was mud?

And so he swung into the familiar Haymarket with exhilaration in his heart. He was on his way to Chrissie. Anywhere became home where she was. . . . Hard luck that the War was over, and that his uniform must be put away to-morrow. Someone who mattered yesterday, who had power, responsibility, trust, who could make life to a number of men either worth something or nothing, he was down to his old level to-day. He was back in the ranks of the civilian army of flotsam and jetsam---Fortescue again. But he had had a damned good time—revelled in every moment of those four swift years of fighting. He had mastered his job, discovered his metier, enjoyed an unbelievable happiness, flown to the very outpost of Heaven. There would be another war before long—everything pointed to that. Meantime life offered a new series of adventures, and Chrissie was his mascot and his wife. Hurrah!

At the corner of Panton Street he was held up suddenly by a young and charming creature whose dump hat was set at a rakish angle, and whose slight figure seemed to have been poured into his admirably fitting clothes. Up went a facile hand in salute and a smile of delight lit up that corner of the street.

"Well met, sir!" The voice was light, crisp,

and filled with joy. "So glad to see you again."

"Very kind of you," said Tony. "Have we ever met before?"

"*Have* we!" There was an illustrating gesture. "No wonder you don't recognize me in this kit, but I had the honour to serve under you in the Gallipoli push, and meeting you at this moment is almost a psychic thing. I was only saying to one of ours at the Club just now that if ever I struck you in town the temporary ugliness of things must certainly be relieved by at least a fiver . . ."

Tony laughed. He had not been in the Gallipoli push. He had never seen this cool audacious fish, this probably excellent soldier. "A dashed good trick," he said with admiration, "and one that I shall adopt without a single doubt. But fivers are devilish scarce I must regret to say. So better luck next time. So long, old bean." And on he went, followed by a cheery "Thanks so much." But for Chrissie he gladly would have shelled out something to the man in whom he recognized a congenial spirit, a brother artist. As it was he husbanded his infrequent coins for his girl.

Panton Street was gloomy. The lights of the Comedy Theatre had been turned out. The shutters of the various shops were down. A stray cat arched its back and fluttered a battered tail and a policeman edged along in the shadows in silent boots. From an open window of the Italian restaurant there floated the hard relentless music of a mechanical piano, and blown on the southwest breeze came Big Ben's reverberations that Tony knew so well. London again. Everything apparently unaltered. The war

might never have happened. Well, well. It had been a long long way to Tipperary . . .

He let himself into a narrow insalubrious door with a latch-key, took the uncarpeted stairs to the top floor three at a time, and barged into the living room in which, long ago, he had been accustomed to share the small-part man's hard earned sandwiches when times were bad.

Chrissie's warm and cheery voice came in from the other room.

"That you, Tony?"

"Yes, old thing."

"I won't be a second. I'm scrambling some eggs."

A great kid, Chrissie! She knew that his dinner had been impossible to eat under the emotion of that evening. But where had she raised the implements with which to cook and eat her scrambled eggs? And as to the room, the dirt and dismalness of which had seemed unconquerable that morning—she had touched it with her magic wand and snowed brown once again. Clean? Spotless. Windows gleaming, the battered table covered with a scarlet cloth, the bed consummately camouflaged as a studio divan, the pictures straight, a bunch of flowers in a shilling vase, their mutual collection of photographs all neat upon the mantelpiece, her books laid out, the poor old carpet young again, a handsome handkerchief tied about the broken lamp shade, a nice aroma of soap, "Three Castles" and polishing fluid. . . . Oh, good old Chrissie. My God, she'd brought him luck! Blow the cursed cornet? Rattle a box in the face of people who'd forgotten the War? Watch him. Ten bob a day, if he could blow and

rattle as much as that, meant three quid a week, and with an occasional fiver won by the trick that had been tried on him just now—who's grumbling? Hadn't they both managed to escape with legs and arms, health and optimism? Wasn't love blazing in this place? It's a long long way to Tipperary, 'old yer 'and out, naughty boy, Keep the home fires burning, Where's the good old Kaiser now? All policemen have big feet. Tiddle-de-um-tum . . . tum-tum!

IV

Her hair was the same colour as the scrambled eggs. And as soon as she had placed her tempting dish upon the table, wiped her astonishingly small hands on a corner of her apron and caught the pride and admiration that was stamped on Tony's face, she flung herself against his chest and put her forehead to his ribbons.

He picked her up, the funny little thing, carried her to a chair and stood her on it, so that her lips should be on a level with his lips. And as he held her tight and took them he could feel that she was weeping, and knew why. "Yes, the good old war's all over, and you don't have to share me any more. You've got me altogether now."

"Oh. Tony, Tony!"

"But you've always had me—day and night you've had me, year by year."

"No, no—not like this."

"Yes, yes, just like this, because I'm yours, I love you, and I'm faithful. But for you and the shield

you made of prayers I shouldn't be here to hold you now. I know that and so does the Bosch. Didn't I always say you'd bring me back ? "

" My dear, my dear."

It might have been the emotion of the evening, the shock of being no longer a Wing Commander, the sense of being down again on earth. The uncertainty, the struggle, the humiliation. What did it matter what it was ? The fact remained that, without shame, and for the first time in his life, his tears came and fell hotly on her golden head. And for many moments they held each other tight, while the scrambled eggs grew cold.

" The thing that makes me sick," he said, " is that this is the rotten best that I can do. The luck's still on my side. I'm gettin' everything from you."

She laughed at that. It was so absurd, so silly. " Who gave me life ? Who gave me love and kindness ? Who married me ? Who made me a lady ? Who gave me the chance to pray, to protect, to be proud, to adore, to work, to sing, to cook—oh my Lord, the scrambled eggs ! "

She freed herself, sprang down from the chair, went to the table and gazed with a rueful expression at her sullen handiwork.

It was Tony's turn to laugh. " That's precisely how I like 'em," he said, lying and swinging a chair to the table. " Solid and just on the verge of slabby. Can we rise to the height of salt, old thing ? "

She was in and out of the back room before he could say knife and possess himself of the fork. On her tray was salt, butter, bread, cheese, pepper, and a napkin. Wasn't he a blooming gent ?

PRISONERS OF HOPE

"It's the Ritz," he said, but before he could touch her she dodged and was in and out again. A glass and a bottle of beer. "Nonsense! It's the Palace, Buckingham Palace," and sat her on his knee.

"Eat," she said, "eat and say nothing, or I shall be frightfully hurt."

Her idea, like that of every woman, was to feed the man she loved. Ill or well, fat or thin, hungry or satiated, he must eat and eat. Never mind the mixture, the hour of the day or night, the inevitable indigestion, he must be bullied into eating. It was "good" for him.

It happened that Tony was hungry. There had been songs all through the dinner and the constant changing of places in order to greet old friends; excitement, a sense of disintegration. The meal had been a farce. And so while he did full justice to Chrissie's preparations, she watched him like a mother, a nurse, a governess, a wife.

His interpretation of her tears was the right one, almost femininely right. While for him demobilization might presently lead to demoralization, to her it led to another honeymoon, to complete possession, to unbroken service, to peace that had been so long in coming. She had rejoiced in his distinction, thrilled at his reckless bravery, basked in the reflected glory of his airmanship, but to her the War had been, not as to him and all the others of his kind, a rag, a beanfeast, a competition in stunts, a well-paid binge, but a nameless horror, an incredible nightmare, a highly organized imitation of hell, the end of which showed all the old bad men of politics snarling and snapping at each other as they scrambled over the broken bodies of their faithful victims, with hate,

depravity, ruin, jealousy and disease as the aftermath of a preventable orgy which had shattered civilization and poisoned all the rivers of the earth. After having been absorbed and obsessed as by a bad woman, injured and stalked by death, inflamed, inspired and intoxicated by the lust of fighting, he was hers again. She had lent him unwillingly to what had been called the Cause, and by the grace of God and the luck that follows drunkards he had been returned. And as for those rooms being the rotten best that he could do for her, she loved them, thought them wonderful, called them home. Give her a few days' time to spend some of the money that she had saved for this very purpose, and they should be worthy of the Hon. Anthony and Mrs. Stirling Fortescue, the envy of their friends. Already they were better than those in which she had been brought up off the Fulham Road, passed the weeks of her touring in the provinces, and never gone back to on the wrong side of Westminster Bridge. He should see!

The least that he could do was to carry the tray into the back room. She permitted him to insist because she wanted to witness the pleasure of a big surprise . . . Over the clothes-pegs hung a curtain of brilliant chintz. The dull gas stove had been polished, plates stood in the empty racks, pots and pans in all their gleaming newness made a pattern on the wall above the well-cleaned sink, a huge zinc can stood at the side of a gaping hip bath. . . .

"You're the wonder of the world," cried Tony. You're just as great an artist off the stage as you used to be on it, Chris. Oh God, what can I ever do for you?"

"You've done it all," she said.

V

With cornet in one hand, box rattling seductively in the other, hat a little tilted, suit shabby although recognizedly well-cut, shoes ancient but polished to perfection, and the good old winning smile Tony continued, week after week, to pounce upon passers-by and pester. The ritual—"Good morning (or good afternoon), Ex-officers' band." Rattle-rattle. "A contribution—no matter how small" . . . rattle-rattle . . . "Melody instead of grumbles—music hath charms to soothe the savage breast and when you are generous the aching void" . . . Rattle-rattle . . . "Thank you so much. So grateful," or "Next time we meet then, on your way home from the bank. *Good* morning (or afternoon, as the case might be)."

Among the men permitted by the police to occupy a safety in the middle of the street, opposite on one side to the Carlton Hotel and on the other to Brown Shipley's office, was one V.C. who deserved it, three D.S.O.'s who ought to have had V.C.'s, and four M.C.'s only one of whom had caught it when things were showered on the staff. The Gordon Highlanders, the Irish Guards, the Rifle Brigade, the R.F.A., the R.A.F., the Machine guns, the Tank Corps, were the regiments represented, and as Tony, with a cunning eye for snobbishness, had worked publicity in the newspapers, through Mortimer Pollock, with photographs read left to right for names, the band had achieved very useful popularity and fame. "The Man with the Eye-glass," "The Peeper," "Town Gossip," "Your loving cousin Eve," and some of

the others who pounded out their snappy snippets for the dailies had done them well; setting out their war records and family pedigrees, their nick-names and repartees. London, from bus conductor to Club man, from little clerks to profiteers, knew them, therefore, as they knew the Co-optimists, the Follies, the Cabinet, and the Labour leaders. They had become an institution and a fact.

Tony's cadging propensities, his charm of manner, his extraordinary good looks, his keen memory for faces, his tact, but, above all, his winning smile, had won him the post instantly of rattler-in-chief. This meant that he did nothing more with his cursed cornet than carry it, and so his lips were spared from becoming callous, and he was never obliged to practise after working hours. More luck. Good old Chrissie. It went without saying that he enjoyed the job immensely. It was so delightfully homogeneous, such a really excellent spree. Getting quickly to know the regulars, as he called the everyday passers on their way to Pall Mall Clubs, and the men and women who worked in all the offices nearby, he established the habit of touching these only once a week, letting them off on other days with a kind grin, a friendly greeting. The irregulars, who formed the vast majority of the people who made that part of London an ever shifting scene, were therefore the main source of income to the band. He was most successful, of course, with women, who gasped at his good looks and were shocked to see their gallant defenders brought to such a pass. From his old friends in the service who were not among the unemployed—there were not by any means a great number of these—he did almost equally well. "Good God,"

they said invariably when the box was rattled under their noses. "You—at this appalling game!" And gave with the same sense of horror that was Sherwood's. "Well," he always answered with a slight shrug, "isn't it better than drawing in chalks on the pavement like poor old Mungo Stewart, or grinding an organ in suburban roads as our old pal Follett does? Isn't it better than going Bolshevic like dozens of others who were with us, and are now attached to the Labour Party to talk revolution on corner tubs? A fiver! You're most frightfully kind." And when the Americans stayed in London on their way to and from the battlefields of France the weekly average of takings looked up considerably, especially after they had read with amazement the illustrated pamphlet made up of cuttings from the newspapers and the Who's Who of the band which Tony took good care to slip into their generous hands. There was nothing like that in their cities where the officers and men of the American Expeditionary Force had all gone back to work. What was the matter with England? They were deeply moved.

Wet and fine the band played and Tony, darting from one side of the street to the other, with the Carlton the most happy hunting-ground, carried on. Watched and admired by several shrewd eyes he had already been offered other and more lucrative jobs. He had, for instance, been tempted by the manager of a great insurance office with a year's contract to become a life and accident tout on a good weekly salary and commission. "With that smile, my boy, you could force a policy on a Bation bull." He had been asked by a London publisher to join his staff as a salesman and go forth to

underwrite a new novel, a new autobiography, and a volume of recriminations and disclosures by an ex-Cabinet Minister. "You have the sort of alluring persistence, my dear sir, that would ensure the sale of a dozen copies of the alphabet." He had been followed by the proprietor of a new vacuum cleaner, the owner of an invention that would make hair grow on a billiard ball, the impresario of a rubber suit that would reduce the weight of an Arbuckle. The head of a firm of fake jewellers that was turning out strings of pearls for miners' wives, and a well-known company promoter who, toeing the windy side of the law, required the services of a glib genius to sell the common stock of a bogus gold mine to a poor but still gullible public. To all of whom Tony laughingly said "No." He preferred his silent cornet and his rattling box. He enjoyed the limelight in which he stood.

"Look! That's Tony Fortescue, brother of Lord Stirling, Wing Commander, married to Chrissie—you remember, of Chrissie and Sissie? Or, *isn't* he good-looking? Isn't he perfectly priceless?"

He liked the air, the exercise, the freedom, the vivacity, the adventure, the sport of drawing reluctant coins from the close. He delighted in his picnic lunches with Chrissie every day in the back alleys, the division of his hard-won spoils every night, the reliance that was placed upon him by his friends.

To Teddy Sherwood these refusals on the part of Tony to better his position, to raise himself out of the street, were unbelievable, irritating, almost indeed a declaration of decadence. Why waste sympathy on a man who must be suffering among other things from what was called, in the Freudian

flabberdashery of the day, the exhibitionist complex ? Why fall to the blandishments of a man who confessed to an inability to knuckle down to easy prosaic work, to a dull and enviable routine which would not only do away with the necessity for begging but make life easier for his wife ? Why entertain the most remote pity for a person who lightly brushed aside all chances to be honest, exemplary, and dignified in order to continue to make a monkey of himself in the streets, who thought so little of birth and conspicuous war deeds as to prefer to remain a public nuisance, a clown attached to a sort of circus, known by his Christian name to bus conductors, taxi-drivers, paper-sellers, all and sundry in the Grand Canal of London ?

Rash and ignorant comments, these, proving a lamentable lack of understanding, and a total inability to size up the character of Tony Fortescue. To the biological uncle it was extremely plain and obvious. Every day on his way to the Athenaeum he passed Tony, contributed as a regular to his box, won his confidences in short and pleasant chats. He explained his nephew's preference for begging in these wise words. "As I told you, just before the War, the boy's a throw back, born four hundred years beyond his time. With all the stuff in him of the old marauding Stirlings the War found him ready, used his brilliance. His vocation was to fight and kill and out-manoeuvre. Now, with peace, how natural for him, like his chieftain forebears, to levy taxes, hand round a rattling box and enjoy an energetic leisure. It is true that he does it with a smile and not as they did, with the flat of the sword and roarings. Methods apart, he is, however, faithful to type, a typical old

Stirling, born to be a chieftain, a sort of king. His would be a happy clan if he had one, a wild, simple, hairy crowd of gipsies, enthralled by his smile and his kindness, under the spell of his humanity and daring, willing to be bled for wars and pleasures, calling him *Coeur de Lion* or some such heroic name. Sermonize as you may, that boy is working out his destiny, is doing the thing that he must do because heredity is the only thing that counts."

VI

It was to Lady George Cornish in her own hospitable house that Tony gave yet another reason for sticking to his box-rattling job. In a dinner jacket, which Chrissie had had turned by a tailor who was doing a roaring trade with pre-war garments, the latest wing tie and the inevitable Ajax on his thick dark hair, he bore little physical resemblance to the deplorable ancestors of his uncle's disquisition.

Dinner, with its accustomed domestic jangles, had been most successfully surmounted. Distinctly older though no less sleek, graceful and debonair, Algernon Templey had steered the flamboyant Kitty into smooth waters with his usual diplomatic art. And so the atmosphere was kindly in the messy little drawing-room in Hill Street, Knightsbridge, when the men joined the ladies as steadily as they could.

Mortimer Pollock, who was with them, bore all the earmarks of a manufacturer of barbed wire. He was fat and prosperous, gracious even, with a far less poisonous tongue. The pioneer of war prophets, his daily articles with maps, explanations, and purely

imaginary statistics of German dead and wounded had been a much boomed feature of an evening paper from the first to the last week of "that ridiculous fracas," as he could well afford to call it *now*. He it was who had winded his brother prophets, Hilaire Belloc and the rest, by proving, as early in the War as 1915, that the German reserves had melted, the German morale had broken, and that peace was a dead certainty by the Christmas of that year. No one rejoiced more fervently in the failure of his confident prognostication than he did, because he continued to draw and save a fat salary for several wordy years. He was a dramatic critic at the moment breaking plays with an elephantine foot, and the man who told the inner secrets of society and politics, without knowing them, every evening in *The Flag*.

Lumley had not done so badly either. Re-commissioned as a Colonel he had occupied a fairly hygienic room in the War Office during the period of the War, and having looked very soldierly and done nothing, had collected a vast number of ribbons and much esteem. But for the Armistice he would have become a Brigadier-General and a K.B.E. Hard luck.

Lady George sat with Chrissie on the sofa. She had fallen victim to the epidemic of bobbed hair, a craze that should have been left entirely to flappers whom alone it suited. The poor old soul, startlingly fat now, heavily and short-sightedly made up so that one eyebrow was much blacker than the other, the left cheek more like a Canadian apple than the right, and a pathetic figure with her Hawaiian head, the colour of which had become a disconcerting

purple from the constant henna. According to Pollock, who had ungrateful moments, she might have been an octogenarian Cleopatra who had taken heavily to gin. Chrissie in her simple home-made frock resembled a celandine growing beside a rhododendron bush.

The room was made all the smaller by being stuffed with furniture, so that it had the exact appearance of a side street auction room in which nothing had a mate, and everything was no older than the Crystal Palace. An Italian, becoming eloquent, would have knocked something over with every illustration. What would have happened to it if Lady George had attempted, even sober, to have crossed it in the dark, or to Lady George, stultifies imagination. She would have been discovered, in all probability, swamped beneath half a dozen occasional tables, swathed in antimacassars, covered with Apostle spoons and silver windmills, lace cushions, foot-stools, and fire guards. It was as full of memories and rubbish as its owner's brain. It was, indeed, characteristically the drawing-room of a retired barmaid who had had a stroke of luck.

Tony picked his way expertly to the fireplace on which there were five early Victorian decorations of different sizes with long glass jangling tears. Leaning his broad shoulders against it, while Chrissie murmured inward prayers, he went back to a point that had been discussed at dinner, and for one who had refreshed his glass twice too often with rather heady port his voice was wonderfully clear.

"Yes," he said, winking at Chrissie, "in spite of all temptations, English weather, and many fluctuations, I like the job I've got."

"Skittles," cried Lady George, a mountain on a molehill, "it's a bally waste of time. With your face and tricky smile, not to mention family pull, you cud be Secretary to a Cabinet Minister, an Anglican parson, or a psycho-analyst. Couldn't 'e, Pollock?"

"Easily, my dear."

"There 'yar, yer see!"

"But why should he?" This was Chrissie, with the Air Force accent that she had studied day and night. "He has a gentleman's job."

Lady George looked over her numerous chins. "A whatter?" she asked in amazement.

"I see her point," said Pollock. "A gentleman is one who lives without working and has the gift of being kept."

Tony laughed. "Without working? Have you seen the amount of ground I cover every day?"

"He comes home doggo," drawled Chrissie. "Utterly worn out."

Pollock had known some of the chorus girls who, in the old days, had married Peers and quickly acquired a manner that was better than the real thing. He had not met the lovely little Cockney twin since the far away night when the fanatic had smashed the Covent Garden ball to atoms, and he himself, being intellectual, had pooh-poohed all thought of war. Her manner and intonation were surprisingly excellent. He regarded her with approval. "Clever, charming, self-sacrificing. Far too good for Fortescue," he thought. "And yet I never saw so happy an expression on any face. If I were an artist I would put a smiling babe into her arms and paint her as the Madonna." He knew nothing of her work as a war nurse, the high

title of "Wendy" that she had earned because of tender fingers and the mother spirit. He could, however, very easily imagine her shining and polishing the place in which she lived to make it the acme of comfort for the man at whom she gazed with so much pride and adoration. A woman always loves a black sheep better than a white one.

"And I'll tell you what, Pollock," said Tony, with what to Lady George was a most irritating enthusiasm. She had the Sherwood point of view. "If I had your pen I could write a series of articles on the changed conditions of London that would be worthy of being preserved for the use of historians. I could, upon my soul, I could. First-hand stuff, expert observations, not the sort of guess-work generalizing that we get from pen wagglers who sit with their faces to the wall. Don't I touch elbows with every conceivable person all day long?"

"Go and write 'em then and become respectable," growled Lady George.

"Nobody would want to read them if he did," said Pollock. "Besides, he would never get them printed. Anything remotely connected with war is anathema to-day."

In spite of constant interruption and not wholly because of port wine—he loved to hold the floor—Tony was determined to dictate the high spots of these articles to the assembled company. "I see what used to be called the landed gentry going past my perch. Where are they mostly going in clothes more shabby than mine? Either to estate agents' offices to put up their houses for sale, or to Christie's to try and sell old masters, first editions, and everything they own that isn't entail male. For the most

part they've lost their sons, their income from investments, and they stagger under a load of taxation with creaking knees."

"As we do," said Lady George. "Lord knows it's 'ard ter face ther daylight these bleed-the-people times."

Tony continued. "Are they grumbling? Why of course they are. But would they give their sons and go broke and lose their shirts and have to resign from all their clubs but one if called upon to go through the whole blessed thing again? Why of course they would."

"No they wouldn't, and I wouldn't," said Lady George, who never had. "I'd up and go to Switzerland with every stick I own, leavin' Lunley in the War Office to revel in red tabs."

But Tony had fallen into his stride. "I see all the old political spell-binders coming out of the Carlton flushed with food and conceit. They're not shabby. They've not been hit. They drew their salaries, hid in funk holes, yapped and yapped and made mischief, broke Generals and Admirals, kept diaries, took copies of official papers for their books, and now, on the ratepayers' money, do themselves devilish well at the best Continental hotels with crowds of sycophants holding European conferences that come to nothing—profiteers. Worse, I think, than the smug bounders from the provinces who made munitions, cloth for uniforms, gas-masks, ran newspapers, bought titles, sold coal, engineered strikes, raised the price of meat and potatoes, rents and wages, dodged income tax, and now roll about in Daimlers, with their comic families, buying furs and pianos, pearls and diamonds, and turn their faces from my

box. They stink of money, one can smell them coming, and the only thing one can say in their favour is that they keep the hotels open and the shops alive and some of the old town houses from falling into decay. And they're the only people, except Americans, who can change places with the landed gentry, keep their grass cut and fruit trees trimmed, subscribe to packs, and revive the feudal system for a time."

"The aristocracy of the future," said Pollock, "if the Labour Party can be kept out of Downing Street—which I doubt."

"And as for all the women who did their bit by dancing with the boys, marrying and re-marrying, giving away war secrets at the dinner table, getting pets promoted by playing games with G.H.Q., they're still dancing and marrying and burying, getting divorces, and having merry hell. They pass me every afternoon in dead men's shoes and fling a goo-goo at the band."

"Ouch," said Lady George.

And Chrissie put her hand over her mouth as though to keep away a nasty taste.

"And what about the Army, Navy, and Air Force?" asked Pollock, seeing a paragraph in all this.

"In training for your Labour Government," said Tony, "going Bolshevie to a man. Nothing like the doss house and the Embankment and frosty faced employment bureaux to bring about that. In every gang of men that marches down my street there's a Lenin and a Trotsky, a future political leader, who dreams in a black rage of distributing the fat money bags of the profiteers. I study the expressions on their faces, and I know." "What did you do in the

Great War, Daddy?" "I became a very angry man, my son."

"And the others—the permanent others, the sturdy middle class?" asked Lumley. "What are they doing now?"

"Carrying on," said Tony, "in the same ding-dong way. Bled by everybody, poorer than ever they were, working harder than ever they thought they could; in they come in the morning, and out they go at night, several suits less a year, hardly any theatres, scanty pin-money for wives and daughters, third-class tickets, servantless villas, no golf, cheaper tobacco. Grouse? Join me one day and hear them grouse. Come and see them eyecing the Carlton grill room before they head for the A.B.C. Come and have a look at their seedy trousers and skinny jaw lines, hear what they have to say about Lloyd George and his gang, the decadent girls and dance clubs, the fat men and over-dressed women in Daimlers, the ludicrous newspaper Peers and Birkenhead. I hear them as they go by in the lunch hour and drop a copper in my box. But if they do grouse they don't strike, lay down pens and stab the country in the back. They carry on and skimp and have no pleasures. They stand between the devil of Labour and the deep sea of the old bad men in politics. They're England's backbone. They're the workers. They're the people who are going to pay our debts."

Pollock sniggered. Deuced funny to hear all this from a man who had turned down several offers of honest jobs and lived by sponging. But the sarcasm that was on his lips died there because Chrissie glared at him like a little lioness, and he sensed that she would spring and hurt him if he spoke. Having been

on the stage and in the limelight, she had an artist's sympathy for Tony's job which, it seemed to her, was that of a comedian. And, in any case, he was Tony and her husband, a great gentleman as he had been always, and in his relations to her he had proved himself to be.

And before Lady George could pull herself together for a broadside, and reiterate her objection to such jackanapery by one whom she called a member of her class, the door opened and in walked Teddy Sherwood, to everyone's surprise

VII

"How are you, Lady George? I saw these lights as I was going along and thought . . . But if I'm butting in . . ."

He was not the same gauche person that he had been before his service, and much of his I'm-just-a-rough-man pose, a damned grocer, had been gufawed out of him by men who had delighted in seizing on a mannerism, a self-consciousness, and worrying it to shreds. As he stood hesitant in the doorway, in day clothes, stocky and bandy-legged, like a prize-fighter who had managed to preserve his nose and lips, he looked considerably older, and as though he had come out of a long illness which had left other marks on his face than the scar. He stammered only because he had caught sight of Chrissie whom he had not seen, and had deliberately avoided the chance of seeing, since that tragic night in Mount Street when she had turned him down for Tony. But he had thought of her every day and night during the

intervening years, and she meant more to him at that awkward moment than she had ever done. She had become an obsession, a complex. He was beset by an inextinguishable passion for her that eat, rat-like, at his sanity.

"Oh, come in, Teddy," said Lady George. "You're always welcome. You know that. Lunley, get a drink for Teddy and give the boy a smoke. Let me see. Yer know Mrs. Stirling Fortescue, don't yer? Or don't yer—I forget. My memory's gone ter pot."

Chrissie laughed and held out her hand. This was the long hoped for opportunity to show this of all men how she could do herself as a lady, how different she was from the little street Arab music hall artist that she had been in the friendly days.

"My deah Teddy," she said with the slight drawl and all the zwah-zwah of what she took to be Bond Street, "how entirely unexpected and delightful. What ages since we've met."

This greatly to Pollock's amazement. "Where's heredity against environment," he asked himself with glee.

The touch of her hand made Sherwood's heart thump, though the new accent and affectation sent it all the way down to his boots. The Chrissie whom he had known and gone mad about would have cried out "Wot O, Teddy, 'ow's every little thing, old dear," performed stunts in her exuberant excitement, danced all round him, curtsyed and played the darling fool. This was one of the poisonous effects of Tony, whom he was hating again. He had drilled her into this lady stuff that was so idiotic, though he had refused the chance to provide her with anything

better than sordid lodgings on pestered people's tips. God, it made him sick.

"Then if yer know ther wife you may also know the 'usband," said Lady George, "though that don't foller these days." She was right about her memory. The box party, the ballarina, the frantic Sherwood, the fight beneath the lamp-post, the miraculous evasion of Bow Street—they were all forgotten now. Her poor old brain had become like a gramophone record much worked by frequent usage.

"Yes," said Sherwood offensively, "I know him," and backed away from the cordial hand.

After which, the antagonism being uncomfortably noticeable, things were somewhat strained. Mortimer Pollock held forth about the trouble that France was making, the stifling of President Wilson's idealism, the squirrel-like antics of Lloyd George, Lumley was tactful and soothing, Tony, who knew his Sherwood and liked him, paid no attention to the jarr, and Lady George, after a strong whiskey and soda became rather maudlin over the servant question, poverty, and the fact that she would be obliged to let half her house to lodgers if things went any nearer to the dogs. "Not 'avin' second sight 'ow did we know the right game was to save the Army pay? It's the only money Lumley'll ever earn, totterin' into dotage every minute, and the blighters are deductin' over a third of my income at the source. Otherwise they wouldn't get it, I needn't bet about that. And now if I do let all the best rooms in this place, who's going ter nip up and down stairs and do ther cleanin', when ther ain't a servant ter be got fer love or money? Lumley? Can yer see 'im? Me, with all this averderpoise?"

But Chrissie was angry. She deeply resented Sherwood's treatment of Tony, and all her mind was set on leaving. And so, at the earliest opportunity, she rose and said good-night. To her extreme annoyance Pollock, who was only there for the dinner, followed her example. And when Lady George made no effort to disguise her relief, but on the contrary, yawned like a crocodile and said "Great Scot, it's late," Sherwood took the delicate hint and followed them downstairs. In the street Tony suggested walking, as he hated buses and no one called a taxi, and going ahead with Pollock, left Chrissie to walk with the man whom she wanted so much to hit. How dared he be rude to Tony when he ought to be blacking his boots? She maintained a high-chinned silence which finally Sherwood broke.

"I met Wagstaffe just now," he said, "I mean Jack Wagstaffe. If you're interested I'll tell you what he said." They were passing the barracks.

Chrissie would have given a good deal to be able to reply that she was not interested, and so to chill him to the bone. But as Wagstaffe had organized the band, and it was obvious from Sherwood's well-known expression that he had something bad to impart, she felt obliged to tell him to go on.

He went on, raising his voice in order to be heard above the traffic. Old people were driving home from the theatres, leaving the young ones at Ciro's and Murrays to be worked into a condition resembling hysteria by jazz band imitations of tortured animals and paleolithic abortions in horrible ecstasy. "The takings have fallen away during the last two weeks," he told me, and if this week shows no improvement he's going to chuck the band."

"Oh really?" She succeeded in making her tone one of complete indifference though she was aghast at the news. The rent, the food, the hair tonic, the tobacco—how could they pay for all these? Rather than that Tony should be forced into work that was uncongenial she would join up again with the Pierrots, sing the latest songs and dance. The skinflint at Southport had asked her to do so, and she had kept his letter up her sleeve. If only Tony would let her. Her salary would keep them both, and then he could be a gentleman of independent means.

His nearness to the girl with whom he was so dreadfully in love, the desire for whom made him ill and furious as in the days before the War, and now filled his brain with ugly schemes to get rid of Tony so that he might have the chance to pour his money in her lap, was too much for this queer, faithful creature. He broke, and went, as she called it, mad.

"Why do you stick to this rotter? Didn't I warn you about him the night he cut in and took you? I don't say that he wasn't a damned great airman. He was and I know it. I would have gone to hell for him any time then. But look at him now the war's over and he's back on earth again. Rotting in the old way. Messing about with a box in his hand and a cursed cornet, all to avoid honest work. Is that the way to live up to his responsibility to be a husband to you? Where are you but in a back street, in filthy rooms? The Hon. Anthony and Mrs. Stirling Fortescue, if he really did marry you—aristocrats in a garret! My God, what women will do for a profile and the grin of a Cheshire cat. You fool, and now what? How do you think you'll live?"

Pull an organ round with him, bring him his lunch to the street pitch that he covers with fish and sailboats with coloured chalks? Or go on the streets to keep him and turn him into a pimp?"

He had stopped for this hideous outburst, held her up so that he should have her attention. His voice was thick, his scar red, his face as white as a sheet.

Turning suddenly, with the feeling that he had gone too far ahead, Tony was amazed to see Chrissie's hand go up and strike Sherwood in the face. In an instant he was with her, his arm about her shoulders, as Sherwood made off quickly because people had begun to gather, sensing fun. "What's the matter? What did he do?"

"Just a bit ev' good old Teddy," answered Chrissie, dropping back to the Fulham Road accent. "If she told him he would kill. "I thought I'd better put 'im in his place."

VIII

When, by the simple process of elimination, the removal of camouflage, Chrissie was presently turning the divan into a bed she looked with a sort of anguish at the home that she had made for Tony. By a hundred deft and feminine touches these rooms had been rendered livable, personal, and warm. The curtains that she had made were herbaceous in their clash of delicate colours. The frowsy arm-chair had been covered with a cheerful cretonne bought for a song at a bankrupt sale. The table cloth, if a little too vivid, struck a sharp bright note beneath the shaded lamp. Paint, ingenuity, and elbow-grease had

turned a sugar box into a first-rate bookcase, in which were placed all the novels that had been given by her woundeds and 'left behind by her dead. Cushions were everywhere. Gaiety, cleanness, colour, and, above all, comfort—she had achieved all these. And now what? Must they be given up when the band went smash, retired from as from a heavily shelled village when the takings came to an end? Not that she cared where she laid her head. She would tramp the country roads, sleep under haystacks, wash in babbling brooks, and eat like a gipsy. But there was 'Tony to consider, the fastidious Tony, him that was a bloomin' gent. Oh God, who might be interested in the adventurers of Panton Street, were they to be driven from this place?

"You looked most awfully nice to-night, Chris. A little duchess, old thing."

Tony longed for a pipe, but mastered the longing having a wife to consider. Why is it that women shy at good tobacco properly smoked and are lenient to cigarettes? About him outwardly there was nothing of the old Scotch raiding lot as he came out of the kitchen-bath-dressing-room in the silk dressing-gown which had been among his large collection of pre-uniform clothes. He stood, on the contrary, for the moderns, though not those of the soft, lisping type who wrote poetry and suffered from temperament and were physically shattered by certain scents. He had never been harder, leaner, and more healthy. There was the sting of all the weathers on his well-cut face, with his small reddish moustache, large humorous mouth, and keen dark eyes.

Immensely pleased at such high praise from Caesar she wrinkled her nose like a rabbit and blew him a

grateful kiss. Bless him, he never forgot to praise her appearance and use flattery, that unrecognized tonic. And not as a reward for his thoughtfulness but because she had followed his eyes to the tobacco jar, she fetched his pipe and said "Catch."

He caught, but shook his head. "Thanks, but no more smoking to-night. I've been a factory all the evening."

She took it, loaded it, probably badly, and struck a match. "I like nothing so much as going to bed in a cloud of smoke," she said.

"But I don't like you to, and you're jolly well not going to. So there's an end of it." And he caught her by the arm and held her close so that he took her breath away. "Everybody knows that I'm the selfish devil round whom the world revolves. But you're the sort of funny little thing who makes even me remember the days of Queen Elizabeth, so you may put that pipe away."

There you are. Why argue? It wasn't a little thing. It was a big one. He treated her like that always, in every conceivable way. Where in the world had Teddy Sherwood got his mistaken ideas? She kissed him and her pride blazed.

She, also, wore a dressing-gown, a blue one, by no means in the first flush of giddy youth because, having been bought during those brief spending days of successful touring, it had seen her through the War. The colour suited her buttercup fairness and matched her eyes, and the thing itself, shrunk from many cleanings, showed the delicious roundness of her tiny body, which was still like that of a girl.

And then she said, "Tony, why didn't you tell me that things were going rocky with the band?"

"How did you know that?"

"Teddy Sherwood said that he'd had it from Major Wagstaffe."

"Dirty little dog. I'm glad you biffed him on the jaw then."

"Didn't you mean to let me know that you're going to be out of a job?"

"Of course not. It's for me to do the worrying. Then, too, I'm not going to be out of a job."

"You're not! Oh, Tony. Has somebody . . ."

"No. But somebody will—somebody must. Haven't I got a mascot? Haven't you always brought me all the luck that's good for a man? Look here. Chris, wash out anxiety. That's for me if there's any need of it. And there isn't. I've got none. I'm afraid it's pretty certain that my box rattling days are numbered. People are fed up with us. We're no longer a novelty. There aren't sufficient Americans to make it pay. All right then. What's the next thing? A taxi? I can drive any ole make of machine and enjoy it. Fresh air and the art of dodging bobbies. I've been hung on the line for that. Or . . ."

She said, "Wait a second, Tony," and broke away from him, opened the drawer of the table, returned with the skinflint's letter, and put it in his hand. This was the precise moment for her to play her trumps, she thought. *She* could work for a change, and he could take it easy. It was fair, and she would love it—the acting that was in her blood, the delight of playing upon an audience for laughs and tears, and the indescribable satisfaction of paying Tony back for his tenderness and chivalry, his rescue, his faithfulness.

He read the illiterate letter at a glance. "Oh damn." He was badly hurt. "You've been advertising for a job behind my back."

"Oh, no, Tony!"

"Then how did this tent man know where to write to you? As far as I know we're not in the Red Book."

"I met him in the street the other day and gave him this address. I thought it might be a sort of insurance against . . ."

"My letting you down?"

"No, Tony, no."

"Um," he said, with an expression of pain about his mouth. "Give a dog a bad name and hang him, eh? You thought I was going to flop back into pre-war Fortescue again. If you're pining to return to the stage, of course I can't stop you. It's a free country."

"That isn't the point, Tony."

"Isn't it? Oh, well then," and he tore the letter into small pieces. "If I could sing and dance and be the monkey the agents talked about before the war, we'd jump at this and take a joint engagement. But I can't, worse luck. All I can do to provide my wife with a roof and bread and butter I will do. I'm not an Algernon Lunley yet, my dear. I'm not a kept man among my other vices." He took her by the shoulders and made her tilt her face up. "When you married me, Chris, you put me on my mettle. You took on a pretty bad egg, but you hatched me out a bird that intends to play the game and go out to scout for food. I've not let you down yet—and no one's more surprised than I am at that. You didn't make me the husband of Chrissie for

nothing, old girl. It's you and me against the world, now as it used to be. But you must believe in me. I must have your faith or I may weaken and go in for rotting again." With strong emotion, but with a laugh to cover it, he lifted her up to a level with his face and kissed her. It was a trick of his.

Long after he had fallen asleep that night with her yellow head on his shoulder Chrissie lay with her eyes open and a little song in her heart. He *had* her faith. It was a flame, a passion. The spirit of Sissie had brought them together the night at the ball, she held, so that there was a fineness in their relationship, an inevitability that made for faith. He had given her life and made it very good. He had given her love which she returned with adoration. She was his squaw, his servant, in spite of the fact that he had made her his lady. He had seen that she understood the innermost meaning of happiness, all the subtle shades of kindness, sensitiveness, and consideration. It was for him then that she felt the peculiar pride that belongs to a woman with a son. And he was right when he called her his mascot. Her shield had warded off the bullet on which his name had been cut. And when the band failed she would continue to bring him luck. He believed it. He had faith in her. And there was God, and there was Sissie and so, without further anxiety, she could go to sleep. Then what was it that flashed a red light like a danger signal in the dark of that room? The thought of Sherwood, his madness of jealousy, desire, and revenge, and that queer persistent love? Yes, that frightened her. "We must be careful," she said to herself, "I must do my best to keep Tony out of his way. I didn't like the look of Teddy

Sherwood—but I can make another shield with prayer”

IX

Tony had said in his Micawber way that “somebody will, somebody must.” But it was not until the band’s last blaring that somebody did.

It had been one of those rare and surprising days in a late spring that make the people of London think of the country and smile. A blue and quiet sky had made a high roof over the old city of horizontal lines. The sun, hitherto persistently shy, had behaved with Italian abandon, painting the fame of summer on the walls. The scent of lambs and lilac had been wafted on the breeze, and everyone had been out like bees for honey. Men had their hair cut and bought new ties, while women hurried to their favourite shops with coloured thoughts and incaution. It was the spring feeling, the emergence from sunlessness.

For all that Tony’s winning smile and seductive words had brought very scant rewards. The band had become a nuisance, an annoying reminder of a nightmare. But just at that moment when one side of the street was in shadow and the windows of the other side on fire a man came up to Tony, touched his hat, and delivered a letter. A valet from his bed-side manner and the fact that his clothes, though good, had never been made for him.

“What the devil,” thought Tony, and asked from whom it was.

“The Earl of Stirling, sir.”

That was a bolt from the blue, if you like. Th

oldest brother who had ignored his existence for seven years—the most sterling of the Stirlings! He thanked the only half respectful man and dodged into the doorway of Brown, Shipley's, behind which the tired clerks were probably sorting out the American mail and winding up the business of the day. The letter, very brief and formal, was written on the paper of the Metropole Hotel and, without the conventional beginning, desired "that you will be good enough to make it convenient to call here this afternoon before six o'clock as I have something to give you."

Oh yes, he would be good enough, though he expected nothing but a lecture in the inevitable Stirlingese.

Then there was the gathering together in a public house, here's luck and hand-shakes, deep depression, and something far more bitter than beer. "The war's most certainly over," said Wagstaffe who had nothing in prospect, a wife and two children. "This is undoubtedly peace." But it was with a springy step that Tony hurried off to Northumberland Avenue, though with three shillings less than a pound as the final settling up. Next week's rent, which had to be paid in advance, would leave precious little on which to make a splash . . . Something to give? A curious remark coming from a brother who had not taken the trouble to inform him of his father's death, and of which he would have known nothing if he had not seen it in the paper one evening after he had had several pieces of shrapnel picked out of his body—a not enjoyable process as he remembered it.

"Why do I take the trouble to answer this lofty

summons," he asked himself as he went. But somehow blood was thicker than water he supposed, with a shrug. As a matter of fact he would have given an ear or an eye to be on affectionate terms with his family, being a man of sentiment. And owned to it, too, if Chrissie had asked him, though it would have had to be she.

The door-keeper of the Metropole, who wore his uniform and medals with a G.H.Q. air, almost said "Hello Tony" as the familiar box-rattler darted up the steps. He grinned and saluted instead. But one of the clerks, in the inevitable tail coat and buttonhole, whirled round at the sight of his old commander and clapped him on the back. "Thought transference, old lad," he said. "We want a handsome person with diplomatic manners to drive a Daimler for our guests. I thought of you this morning. Fairly good pay and tips. Americans are generous. Care to take it on?"

"Thanks most awfully," said Tony. "On my way out I'll look in at the office and discuss the pros and cons. I have to go up and see my brother. He has something to give me--probably in the nature of a nasty kick in the mouth. Here's hoping," and, laughing, he went across the crowded foyer to the desk. "To see the Earl of Stirling," he sang out, and gave his name.

Formalities over, he left the elevator on the second floor, found the room and knocked. The valet opened the door.

"His Lordship will see you in a moment, sir."

Left alone in that large and obvious hotel sitting-room Tony looked about him with keen interest and curiosity. He knew his brother's overdone simplicity,

and was not, therefore, surprised to find that the room was almost as uninviting as when it had been left by the hotel cleaning woman. But for two or three books and papers on the table and a neat leather dispatch case on the cushionless sofa it might have been occupied by nothing but an aimless incompatible fly. Because there were no flowers in the cold vases and no photographs on the bare mantelpiece Tony came to the conclusion that his brother was in London as a bachelor. In his memory there was an everlasting picture of this man's impersonal room in the old Scotch house. He was standing at the window watching the earnest students of the drama who had formed a queue outside the pit of the Playhouse when the door of the bedroom opened and he was given a flat "good morning" in a stranger's expressionless voice.

"How do you do," he said, and turned to find that his brother looked every day of his forty-eight. Tall, heavy, with dry red hair turning white at the temples, an unbarbered moustache, thick eyebrows, a large freckled nose, a ruddy complexion and a clefted chin, here was a man who might have been his father come to life again as he remembered him when he visited the nursery of the old house in Perthshire to say "Don't do this and that." He had been a man of don'ts. Here was one to whom deer stalking, salmon fishing, and game shooting were not mere delightful hobbies but the grim necessary business of life; one who was utterly without imagination, who couldn't carry a tune, be wrenched from the straight and narrow by a dimple, who could do without the sun. Every inch a modern Stirling in his Scotch homespun and broad toed shoes.

"I have been endeavouring to find you for a couple of years," he said. "Since, in fact, my father's will was proved, and in going over his papers I came across a letter addressed to you."

So the something was a letter. A kick in the mouth from the old man, then.

"Anything sent to the War Office or Cox's would have been forwarded," said Tony, blandly.

"But, you see, I was not aware of the fact that you were in the service."

"Where else was I likely to be, sir?"

It was a disconcerting question which was left unanswered. And there was a subtle touch of impertinence in the "sir." Young devil.

"I should not have been able to get in touch with you now if I hadn't seen you this morning—begging in the street."

"Hardly begging," said Tony, who was greatly amused. "Didn't you think the sweet strains of our band were worthy of recompense?"

Lord Stirling obviously did not. From the movement of his eyebrows he considered, on the contrary, that there were already too many unnecessary noises in London. "What was your rank, may I ask?" He almost said "if any."

"Wing Commander, R.A.F."

"Oh."

"And yours?"

"Colonel. Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders."

In the quick exchange of looks there was a touch of mutual respect—something grudging on the part of the older and the blameless man.

"Can't you get anything better to do than the . . . the thing you're doing now?"

"I thought perhaps that the 'something to give you' in your brotherly note meant that you had settled that question."

Stirling missed the irony of this remark, and having warmed a little to the once black sheep, who now looked so healthy and confident and had held up the family reputation in the War, came out of his reserve a step or two.

"No," he said, "and I'm sorry I have nothing to give. In fact the present ghastly taxation has made it necessary for me to get out of Stirling Castle and live in the agent's cottage, where my wife is her own cook."

"Like mine," said Tony, "and a pretty good one, too."

"I'm in London in the endeavour to let the Castle so that I can send my second boy to Oxford. My oldest boy was killed, you know."

"I didn't know," said Tony. "I deeply regret to hear that."

There was a short uncomfortable silence, during which Lord Stirling, in order to hide his emotion, bent over the dispatch case, opened it, and took out a large envelope, heavily sealed."

"Well," he said, "here's the letter from father."

Tony noticed that, this time, he didn't say my father and was glad.

Poor old Alexander. The war had hit him hard. An estimable Stirling had gone down in the winnowing of England's youth. Hard luck. He took the mysterious letter, and as he did so and read his name on the envelope in the well-remembered handwriting of the unbending man who had so bitterly resented his birth, a queer feeling ran through his arm to his

heart. The last well-deserved words that he had heard from his father had been "Get out, you blackguard, and never come near me again." And now he was dead. It was too late to let him see all the ribbons that the blackguard had won.

Lord Stirling made it clear that there was nothing more to do or say by looking at his watch. Whereupon, never expecting to see him again because blood wasn't in this case anything like as thick as water, Tony put on his hat, clicked heels, and saluted.

"Good-bye," he said.

"Good-bye," replied his brother.

That was all.

X

And having wound up the whole story to Chrissie with the joyful news of his engagement to the Metro-pole Hotel as a chauffeur, "a frightfully smart uniform old thing," Tony brought the letter from his pocket and turned it over and over in his hand. "Somebody did, you see," he added. "Excellent wages, too, and tips. Good old Chrissie."

He looked about the room with an expression of the deepest thankfulness. "Ah, then, we're safe again," she said.

"Safe? I should jolly well think so. I've got this job for life if I care to keep it. No joy riding, of course. The most rigid exercise of mind over matter to keep well within speed limits. But whenever I'm tempted to let the old bus go after the air has gone to my head I shall murmur the word Chrissie, think of this Ritz-like suite and

lumber along in the timid manner of a father of a family."

She caught his exhilaration, his infectious laughter, and indulged in a *pas seul* in the middle of the room. It was marvellous, perfectly marvellous. Just think of having the luck among all the unemployed to step into a soft thing like this on the very day the band died! . . . By saving as much as she could out of the new salary—and tips—she would be able to make Tony more comfortable with a new carpet some day soon and buy those coloured prints of horses before which he always stopped to gaze.

And again Tony turned the letter over and over, examining the seal with its Stirling crest, following every firm stroke of the familiar hand. At school, at Oxford, that writing had always led to a bad ten minutes, a cold shudder and a foolish act—the quick reaction of a total lack of sympathy, a huge misunderstanding. Well, he had been, of course, a pretty bad egg. Then, too, it must not be forgotten that he had been the accidental means of killing his mother, and so the old man had had the right to nurse a grudge. He had known what it was to be in love.

Finally, with a curious laugh, he gave the letter to Chrissie. "I'd like you to open it, if you don't mind," he said, being superstitious. "Your voice will temper the wind to the shorn lamb."

"Anything you say," said Chrissie, "but—I dunno. I wish you hadn't got it." All the same she went to the window for the last of the light. "It's written on Stirling Castle paper and dated 29th March, 1912."

"Two weeks after he told me never to see him again."

“Dear Anthony,” it says. “I have to-day returned from a reluctant visit to London, and am writing this far from its noise and futile rattle, late at night. Dining with your Uncle Alan the evening before I left I told him about you and all the trouble you have caused me, the disappointment, the humiliation, and the shame. And while he held no brief for you and your misdemeanours he mounted his biological horse, proved to his own satisfaction that you were what he called a misfit and, delving into the question of heredity, endeavoured to excuse your anarchical behaviour by proving to me that you had thrown back to the early forebears of this family on whom the blame for your misdeeds must therefore, in all fairness, be placed. As one who has long been in the habit of breeding dogs and horses, watching bird life and the ways of ants, I am inclined to agree with his explanation of your inability to conform to the laws and conventions of the present day, though not any less unwilling to reverse my injunction which I hope will keep us permanently apart. Nevertheless, having dipped into the Stirling archives and read with horror of the lawless doings of your ancestors and mine, I am, I confess, sorry that you should have inherited their tendencies and suffer under the alarming handicap of their characteristics. I cannot see any other end for you than the jail or the stage. Your Uncle Alan suggested that I shall use what influence I have to send you either to South Africa attached to an exploration company that is opening up places unguessed, as he put it, by the civilized hand—which I am unable to do—or get you a commission in a tribe of Arabs so that you may be constantly in fights.”

"Great Scot," said Tony breathlessly. "That was a bright idea."

"A ghastly idea," cried Chrissie. "We never should have met."

"Why not? I should probably have raided a town where you were playing and carried you off to my tent. But go on. Don't stop. This is like hearing my father's voice over a telephone connected with another world." And he leaned forward eagerly, greatly excited and keen. The underlying vein of irony was immense.

"I don't like it," said Chrissie. "I wish your brother had never found you. I'm beginning to be afraid."

"No, no. Go on. Please go on. There's going to be something in this that'll change everything for us. I feel it in my bones."

And so she went on, but with a sense of gooseflesh, like one in touch with a ghost. "But I have no friends among Arabs," she read. "I am a most untravelled man. The trouble in Algeciras goes to show, according to my way of thinking and that of Lord Roberts, that you will, however, get all the fighting that is good for you nearer home. My intention is not to interfere with your career in any way. If you have any of your good and beautiful mother in you, two or three unassisted years will help to bring it out. If, on the contrary, you are all Stirling of the ancient vintage as your uncle asserts, you will proceed uninterruptedly on your way to the gutter. Be that as it may, I have conceived a plan, as the outcome of my talk to Uncle Alan, that I am now about to disclose to you in this letter—one which will be found among my papers by

Alexander after my death, and only delivered to you if he can find you then. The doctor consulted by me in Harley Street does not give me much more than another year to live. During my honeymoon with your beloved mother we visited the South Sea Islands, and while there, being under the spell of its strong romance, I bought an Island called Paradise for a comparatively small amount of money believing that, in after years, we might renew the joy of young love among its cocoanut trees in primeval simplicity and sunny peace. The opportunity to do so, however, never came, owing to the responsibilities of family life, but I maintained the ownership of the Island, and it is mine to-day. Through all these years it has been under the charge of a man named Quex, a trader, who lives in a place called Apia in the Pacific from whom I have heard from time to time. The deeds of this property, which is, I have been given to understand, worthless though lovely, are not in the hands of my lawyers as you will believe, knowing me, but are buried in a tin box on the island in a certain spot, for the reason that I did not desire to lay myself open to the incredulous laughter of my legal advisers for so fantastic a purchase, being Scotch. The enclosed chart, of which Quex knows nothing, indicates quite clearly the place where, in that brief ridiculous mood, I buried the box. If, when this letter and its enclosure is placed in your hands, you find yourself with sufficient money and courage and assiduity to set forth on a voyage of discovery Paradise is yours, and there you may establish yourself as the ruler of its ingenuous natives, and in turning back the calendar to the Chieftain times to which, according to Uncle Alan, you so

properly belong, live in comfort on its various fruits, levy taxes for your luxuries, and raid the neighbouring islands when you feel the lust for blood. Believe me, Your unaffectionate and unwilling father, Stirling."

"Poor old Tony," said Chrissie. "That was a nice sort of father to have! Well, thank God for the Dainler, the salary and tips."

But bursting with excitement Tony sprang to his feet. "Queen of Paradise. I salute you," he cried out, went down on one knee, and put his lips to her hand.

"Oh no, Tony, don't be silly. It's impossible. It's a dream."

"Is it?" he said. "You watch me. That island's going to be ours. As King and Queen of Paradise, back we'll go to the good old days."

"How?" she asked. "Oh Tony!" She would rather be queen of those rooms.

He caught her close and kissed her, laughing. "I'm damned if I know," he said.

PART III

PEACE

I

THE man, who decorated the entrance to the new dance Club and opened cab doors for its patrons had held Tony up on the steps. And so Chrissie was kept waiting in the foyer, the walls of which were covered with the raw and confused handiwork of the people who called themselves futurists because they had never been taught how to paint. The lugubrious wailings of farm yard instruments accompanied by irresistible banjoes and the rioting of drums and tin cans drifted through the constantly opening door that led into the latest Mecca of Jazz.

A tall man with a dyed moustache and a scraping of thin hairs plastered on a pale head meandered round with speculative eyes on Chrissie. "A Fragonard," he said to himself, with the dull excitement of a picture dealer, "escaped from her place of honour on the walls of a Rothschild drawing room!" And then, seeing that she was alone, became courageous, caught her eye and spoke. "I would adore to have the pleasure of taking you in," he said.

It was from the Hon. Chrissie Stirling Fortescue that the answer came, coolly, crushingly, and with all the contempt that was needed to kill. "Thank you, no. But I will look in at your bookshop next Friday for a pair of bathroom slippers."

Whereupon the remains of this picker-up crumbled, liquified, and disappeared.

And then Tony came in with his graceful salmon-like swiftness, tossed his coat and opera hat at a

most amused attendant, and put a hand through Chrissie's arm. "Frightfully sorry to keep your Majesty waiting," he said. "Do forgive me. Shall we dance to Pollock's table?"

"Rather," said Chrissie, with music in her eyes and feet.

These occasional nights at Cabarets either at the expense of Tony's friends or out of their own savings were like champagne to her. Hadn't she been born to dance? But she wished that he hadn't fallen into the light-hearted habit of calling her your Majesty. It proved that she had not wholly succeeded in making him forget the subtle magnetism of Lord Stirling's ridiculous island. Panton Street was Paradise to her.

Under a Batik ceiling that ballooned above their heads a thick jam of dancers covered the too small space between the hedge of tables. The interpretation of jazz, if that was what it was supposed to be, was painted in lurid colours on the walls and pillars, grotesques in Chelsea caricature of Russian art, disturbing to the senses. The orchestra of men in constantly strange contortions was led by a short and ecstatic person of disconcerting fatness with a piercing violin. He wore a suit of skin tight and far too skimpy clothes, and when he added to the din with harsh harmonies, swaying from foot to foot and wobbling like a jelly, a line of shirt protruded over the top of his trousers beneath a little waistcoat with glistening buttons. His face was set into a glassy smile, and he rolled his eyes at the clutching couples. He looked completely mad. Cigarette smoke curled like filmy snakes in the airless room above the blood red lamp shades. The place's appropriate name was "Ginn's."

"That was an old pal of mine on the steps," said Tony, doing his best to dodge the hands, heels, and elbows of the congested mass. "We were in the same old hospital for endless weeks. He's hitting the sky to-night because he was able to get his V.C. out of his Uncle's to-day."

"Oh, that's good," said Chrissie. "Poor boy."

Tony bent down and kissed her golden hair, not as a tribute to her Wendy heart, the perpetual kindness of which he knew so well, but because he loved her and wanted suddenly to let her know it. He was a born lover.

She tilted her face and smiled and wrinkled up her funny nose, grateful and proud.

"Whenever I dance with you, young 'un," he said in her ear, "everything rolls back like a fog to the night when I saw you with Teddy and crashed . . . Remember?"

She scoffed at so idiotic a question, and pressed herself close. Where would she be at that moment but for his having cut in?

"Good old Chris," he said in a flame of devotion "Good old Chris."

And if she had been less simple and forthright with a wider knowledge of men, she certainly would have asked herself what the emotional outburst meant. She would have known that a renewal of faith on the part of the average man to his wife always followed either a mental or a physical break-down and a boy-like desire to be mothered, forgiven and nursed.

To tell the truth, poor Tony had that day been through a trying experience of which he was ashamed. An extremely pretty customer whom he had driven out of town had left the car and sat on a stile and flirted, and he had been the Tony of pre-war days,

under the fire of eyes. It had been mental only, a mere affair of words. But according to him as he was going now, it was an act of disloyalty, a brief departure from the rules of his partnership to which he was eager to stick. Would it be wise and right to tell her or simply kiss and be mute?

"Be honest, you dog," he said to himself, and told her, bowdlerizing slightly, of course. And he wound up, there on the floor with his arms round her, having to shout above the row with "Chris, old thing, I adore you. You're all the world to me."

To which she replied, equally loudly, "I know I am, my love," and mothered, if anything proud of the fact that other women saw him as she saw him, while she alone possessed.

Not because of the difficulty of making themselves heard but of the insidious effect of the never ceasing agony of trapped animals they presently ceased to talk, and like all other enthusiasts on that inadequate floor hugged in silence, and with utterly expressionless faces wobbled along by inches in a jellyfied procession of frozen joy.

Alone at his table, Pollock, the ertswhile prophet and cynic, reformed by the possession of a sound deposit account, took mental notes for a paragraph of slim diaphanous girls and men of various ages who had escaped from death.

Ginn's—what an appropriate name for that place.

II


In all London there was not a happier or a gayer couple than Tony and his sunbeam. They found

life a most delightful game, and played it daily with all the gusto of recent converts. Hard work and long hours offered no annoyance to the most popular and the most consistently cheery chauffeur who had ever been in the service of the Metropole Hotel. Looking extremely smart in what he would just as soon have called a livery as a uniform, Tony regarded the job that he had held all through the summer as an excellent joke. Nothing except flying had ever given him so much interest and amusement, and he revelled in being regarded by his customers as a romantic figure. It satisfied the play-acting side of his elemental character to masquerade as a servant when he knew himself to be the King of Paradise, to bask in the limelight that it suited his employers to focus upon him as a Peer's son and an ex-Wing Commander who was honestly knuckling down to the Gilbertian situation that was the aftermath of war. And nothing had ever provided him with so exquisite a sense of surprise as the regular nightly act of handing over to Chrissie the tips that had resulted from his winning smile. That he, who once had never conceived the possibility of making money in any other way than by gambling, was now earning regular wages by the sweat of his brow, was something that often seemed too fantastic to be true. The whole thing was, indeed, as the War had been, an adventure, an excitement, and as such it appealed to all that part of him that had been explained so truly and so often by the biological uncle.

During those busy months he had been the hero of many pleasant and one or two rather difficult incidents, all of which he had retailed to Chrissie over the supper table in those rooms which now

had a brilliant new carpet and the set of horsey prints. He had been particularly tickled at the one in which the Dowager Duchess of Chelsea had been concerned, and had made the place echo with Chrissie's laughter at his description of his various picnics in Richmond Park with that notorious old harridan. She had taken so violent a fancy to him that she had disrupted all the plans of her family by staying in London through July and August in order to indulge in an Elinor Glyn flirtation with her Daimler man.

Considerably over seventy, this once beautiful woman, who had made history and supplied endless gossip from the days of her youth, was still capable of going off at hectic tangents, and although many times a grandmother, still dressed young, made up with all the care of an actress, and filled her days with the tempestuous energy of a flapper. "The Man with the Eyeglass" had made two special trips to Richmond Park for the purpose of describing the quaint and democratic sight of this be-chiffoned old woman and the good-looking chauffeur enjoying a rural lunch together on the grass at the side of the road beneath the shadow of an ancient oak. If she had not been captured by one of her more courageous daughters-in-law and taken almost by force to the country, the flippant paragraphs in the more and more unmerciful chit-chat of the evening papers, which had made the hair of all her grandchildren stand on end, would have continued far into the autumn. Her love-letters to Tony, written from what she called her prison in Warwickshire, made wonderful daily reading for a time. They ceased only when she had transferred her affections to a young and hirsute member of the Labour Party whose constituency



she assisted in nursing by holding meetings round her car. Her temporary espousal of socialistic principles caused Homeric laughter in the House of Commons, and did a good deal to pour further ridicule on the party that talked violently about adopting a capital levy without any such intention, when or if they were able to sneak into power between the Conservatives and Radicals. There was no other hope for them.

Then there was the episode, which had led to splendid tips, in which a new rich family from the Midlands had occupied the car—a tall, thin Methodistical man who had succeeded in obtaining the contract to supply rum to the British forces for the period of the War; his enormous wife with arms like thighs, and an insatiable desire for beads and rattling bangles; two pathetic daughters who too exactly fulfilled one's preconceived idea of how, having seen the parents, they ought to look; and the only son, a purely accidental affair, who seemed unfortunately to be aware of the fact and mope. Knowing no one in London, and being eager to break the devastating monotony of family silence, they had hired the Daimler for a fortnight for the purpose of being introduced by Tony to his friends. Only one who had been clever enough to obtain a supply monopoly of so greatly needed an article during such excellent opportunities for business as are provided by a war could have thought out so gorgeous an idea. The clerk with the buttockhole had spread about, of course, the story of the attractive chauffeur, and so the rum-merchant saw his way immediately to social activity. Sending for Tony he explained the position simply and frankly, and stated that every introduction

to a man or woman with a well-known name would be worth a pound to him. How was that? "Perfectly wonderful," said Tony, who was not a business man. If he had been he could have made it five. And the next day found him driving slowly up and down the streets where the needy ex-R.A.F. officers were most likely to take the air. He was imbued with the laudable idea of killing two birds with one good stone--of supplying the rum bottle with silence breakers and hungry men with ample food. Nothing could have been more successful. Before the end of the third day the Midlanders were in the inner ring of London. Four Peers, a dozen Honourables, a Baronet or two, and several famous aces, directed their steps to the Metropole at every meal hour, and when the hint was given that the manly circle must be broken here and there by a charming female figure, it was taken immediately with alacrity and ease. Like all other professions the oldest in the world had been badly hit since demobilization. The hungry friends of the Honourables condescended to accept the heavy hospitality of these naive outsiders with a charming grace. It need hardly be said that the juxtaposition of faces at the ever widening dinner table caused several dangerous attacks of mirth to sophisticated Londoners who were seated near.

Chrissie banked that money—not, as Tony liked to think, for the triumphant procession to the South Sea Islands, but against a rainy day. That practical little soul had served a long apprenticeship in poverty. Hunger had been on intimate terms with her. At any time there might be a change in the office of the Metropole and another man's friend turn Tony off the driver's seat. And as to Paradise it was not only

unattainable, but a waste of time to consider. An island, probably very hot, with biting insects, bad water, dust, with coloured people who danced and made weird noises, without soap, shops, and theatres, busses, bustle, the constant tingles that London gave. She wouldn't be able to stand it. Heavens, what a spot! Then, too, she refused to accept all that stuff about Tony. He was *not* a throw-back. He was as she had known from the instant that she had met him, a gentleman, born and belonging to his time. Just take a look at him if you don't believe her, standing with his back to the fireplace in that waisted coat, those peculiarly wide trousers, the blue shirt with its small limp collar, the shoes that he always cleaned himself, the glossy hair brushed back from the wide forehead, the fine grey eyes, the straight nose, the large firm laughing mouth. He was Oxford, Air Force, Piccadilly. Anything else was absurd. He would be lost on a far-off island with nothing whatever to do. As utterly lost as she would be away from the rhythm of her dear old town, its leisurely rush, its soft grey lines and smells. That was her belief. What if he did spend the last half-hour of every day in gazing at his father's chart? That only meant that the romance of the thing amused the boy that was in him, fired an imagination that had been fed on Stevenson, Robinson Crusoe, and the like. And when he called her Queen and paid her deference in his knightly way it was only because it appealed to a sense of humour that was one of his strongest points. That was her way of looking at it.

She was, however, wrong—all wrong, and wide of the mark. The truth was that the thoughts and dreams of this outwardly modern man were centred

wholly on Paradise. The island called him over the incessant roar of traffic, the quiet hymn of the country to which he drove his fares, and the dramatic calm of the city during its hours of sleep. Its voice became insistent. It made him homesick. It said to him that there, among those naive people, he would find himself back in the age that was his; and there, like the ancient Stirlings whose blood was in him, he would come into his own, take his place as Chieftain, give his natives kindness, thrills and hero worship, pomp, colour, and patriotism—and make them pay.

III

“But how the blazes,” asked Tony of a completely indifferent 1919, “am I to turn back the pages of this jolly old life to 1650 or so? I can’t fly back, even if I could pinch a machine and I can’t drive back, although the Metropole Daimler goes like a bird.”

And so, from day to day, he left it like that and carried on. Money was the only miracle that could perform this backward leap by taking him to the island, but where was that to come from when Chrissie’s savings were constantly eaten into by dull weeks?

The small salary was regular—thank God for that. But tips, especially as the Americans had departed with the swallows, had dropped steadily away. Rent had to be paid, food bought, clothes and shoes repaired and replaced, a little pleasure indulged in. Times were hard. And when Tony, his day’s work done, pored over the chart of the island under the light of

the Panton Street lamp, with what Chrissie called his boy's heart inflamed with the desire to be King, to carry on his vocation as the leader of simple men, his feet were anchored to the present though his spirit had flown to the past.

The late Lord Stirling's letter had done more to unsettle Tony than any of his lectures.

And then, one night late, just as Chrissie had cleared away the supper, Sherwood walked in, the man who had money, Teddy Sherwood who, little as Chrissie liked it, seemed uncannily to be hooked on to Tony Fortescue's life.

Was there anything more in this than accident ?

"I'm ill," he said in his abrupt way, standing pitifully in their astonished gaze, offering no apology for his unannounced intrusion. "I'm devilish ill. I claim your friendship." And he fell into the nearest chair and put his head in his hands.

Tony was up in an instant. This was the man from whom he had received great kindness in the old days, and, in comparatively recent ones, unsparing service. He could never forget. "My dear old man, what can we do ? Name it. It's yours for the asking, isn't it, Chris ?"

Chrissie's heart had stopped. One of her jobs had been to keep these men apart. She was frightened of Sherwood, and here he was, inside. All the same she was a Wendy and suffering touched her heart. "Yes," she said, "What is it, Teddy ?" And put her hand on his arm.

Sherwood sat up and looked from one to the other, and then at the comfortable room which made his own in Mount Street seem cold as a grave. His face was drawn and pale. Sleeplessness had left its

marks. He looked dried up and hollowed-eyed, and burning like one who had been through a neglected fever without sympathy and care.

"It's just as bad as it was that night you put on a bandage," he said, as though the War had never intervened. "Tony, I'm ill for the sight of Chrissie, that's what's the matter with me. She was mine till you took her from me. I've come to say that you must let me see her. You must. I claim it, and seeing that it was through me that you got to know her, I have the right."

What was to be said to that?

"You're staggered, and I knew you would be," he went on. "But I did things for both of you that you've got to remember. I'm here to present my bill. You can pay it with simple human feeling and friendship, and I tell you I claim it now." There was no hysteria about him. He was quiet but insistent and extremely pitiful. He looked from one to another with the eyes of a hungry dog.

And once more Chrissie's heart stopped. The last time that she had seen this man he had said things that were unforgiveable. He had let down his fourth wall and given her a sight of an ugliness that had made for many nightmares. Since then she had not merely hoped and prayed that he might be kept out of their way but exerted all her influence over Tony, which was magical, to prevent him from throwing a friendly line to Sherwood in gratitude for former help and in memory of mutual war work. And now, suddenly, he had broken into their stronghold with a claim that must be met.

As a matter of fact Tony was not staggered. His instant reaction to his old friend's moving appeal

was that of compassion. He was, indeed, greatly moved. Whatever else he lacked in strength of character, he possessed loyalty, kindness, and one of the rarest of human qualities, sentiment. And so, disturbing as this was to the comfort of his home, the delicious intimacy of his partnership, and knowing nothing of Chrissie's superstitious fright, he expressed his eagerness to pay. "All right, Teddy," he said, "let's talk it over quietly and see what's the best thing to do. I'm with you in this as in everything else. I've forgotten nothing and never shall."

"What about you?" Sherwood looked up at Chrissie, and it was perfectly plain that he was referring to what had been said at their last meeting and his punishment.

"I'm with Tony through thick and thin," she replied.

"Thank you both," said Sherwood, though he would have preferred to hear her agreement and forgiveness in words that made her adoration of Tony less bitter to him. He got up and went over to the fireplace. Among the crowd of photographs of men in uniform there was not one, he saw, of himself. He put his back to the mantelpiece and started to make a sort of *apologia pro vita sua* in a low monotonous voice.

"It's like this. Since the let-down that followed demobilization, I've been living alone, living on myself like a sort of mental cannibal. I'm not a gregarious person. I haven't the gift of making friends. I can't rot about as other men can, and there's only been one woman in my life. There'll never be another. I've been drinking hard. I hoped it would make me sleep, but it hasn't. It's only been

poisoning my mind and undermining my health. Look at me, that's all you've got to do. I hate myself. I'm afraid to be alone. I'm haunted with hideous thoughts. In fact I'm devilish ill—brain as well as body. I need kindness. I want to be rescued. I want sane people and laughter and a little happiness. Above all, I want to be taken in by you two and looked after a bit. I've missed the tonic of Tony's leadership, Chrissie, and I ache for the comfort of seeing you. Just *seeing* you, alive, and not as you are in my thoughts, dead, and wholly separated. I shan't be a worry or play the giddy ox. It's just that I want to be in it, recognized, and to help things along. Do you understand?

"Of course," said Tony. Poor devil. He painted a ghastly picture. "What's your suggestion, old boy?"

"There's a furnished flat next to mine in Mount Street. I took it the other day to prevent anybody from moving in and playing the piano. Bring all your things over and live there and let me potter in and out, have meals with you, and join up. I shall go to the office again every day from nine to five. I shan't be hanging about doing nothing and getting on Chrissie's nerves. It's a question of evenings—not being able to think." He stopped talking as though he had completely unwound his pent-up monologue, and looked from one to the other with a huge appeal.

"Well," said Tony, "I'd love it." There would be elbow room in Mount Street and a bath room, good furniture, a proper place for clothes, a better setting for Chrissie, and with no rent to pay a servant if one was to be found to do the work of the house. Oh God, how he had longed to be able to take Chrissie

out of the kitchen. All the sybarite in him warmed to the welcome change. "What do you say, Chris?"

"I'll do whatever you think best," said Chrissie, with a despairing glance at the nest that she had made so livable and bright.

"All right, then. We'll take possession to-morrow, Teddy. Dine with us, and pocket a key for yourself. You shall be on the top of your form again in a week or so. Leave that to us."

"Yes," said Chrissie, "we'll look after you now, Teddy. You'll see." She managed that there should be no regrets in her hospital smile although there was a foreboding of change and trouble in her heart.

As though too thankful for any words, Sherwood shook hands with these two good friends, picked up his hat and left.

If Chrissie had been blessed, or cursed, with the gift of second sight she would have seen an expression in the eyes of that queer creature, as he stood in the street for a moment under the lights of the Italian restaurant, which would have frozen her blood with fright.

IV

Sherwood had stated his case—and it had become a case—with honesty and truth. He was not aware of the fact, however, that the illness which he had endeavoured to describe was not wholly due either to his need of Chrissie or to loneliness. The after effects of the War played the largest place in it. Like many men who had been in the thick of fighting, he had developed a sort of post-war shell-shock, a

most insidious and not easily curable form of shattered nerves brought about by what he had called and rightly "let-down." By this he meant the sudden unhitching of concentration, the complete cessation of the excitement to which he had been screwed up, and the bewildered drop back into a life without the familiar duties, the accustomed dangers, the daily excitements, the old sense of responsibility. And being, as he had said, ungregarious and temperamentally unable to riot his memory during deliberate loneliness had played the war over and over again to him like a permanent record on a gramophone, and unwound itself in an ever recurring series of moving pictures before his sleepless eyes. Alcohol had not helped to dispel his nightmares, but, on the contrary, had sharpened his ears to sounds that he thought had been forgotten, and his sight to things that were bad to be remembered. And then to this unhealthy mental condition had been added the exaggerated agony of his desire for Chrissie, and his resentment and jealousy of the man with whom she lived. He had seated himself upon the altar of martyrdom, and with perverted enjoyment counted the drops of blood that came from his pricking crown. His hatred of Tony had become consolidated by an ineradicable belief in his complete unworthiness of Chrissie. And this had grown to be an obsession, because he had wiped out his respect and admiration of Tony as a fighting man and gone back to his old opinion of him as a rotter, a man who had been a charming but persistent parasite, a gambler, a loose fish. A leopard could never change his spots, an Ethiopian his skin, and he held, therefore, that Tony was the same man married as he had been when single. He was quite

certain in his dogged way that Chrissie's courageous smile and apparent cheerfulness hid unhappiness and pain, and that her unaccountable infatuation must sooner or later give way before inevitable disillusion.

Hence his visit to Panton Street, his cunningly thought out scheme to work upon the quick sympathy of the only two people in the world who swamped all other thoughts, and the renting of the rooms which were next to his own in Mount Street. Weeks of sleepless nights and brain storms had left him with a distorted way of looking at things, and he had finally convinced himself that it was his duty to the girl he loved to have her under daily supervision. He had served her faithfully during her professional tours, nailed her to the mast of everlasting love, and been her only male friend long before Tony had ever thought of her except as a music hall artiste. It was now for him, of all men, to protect her, to see that she was provided with the comforts which Tony, as a chauffeur, was unable to pay for, and to be constantly and watchfully at her side as a guardian angel. Also, curled up like a live worm in his disturbed brain was the thought of getting Tony out of Chrissie's life, ridding her of his influence, the power of which he knew from personal experience. He had not yet managed to formulate a definite idea of how this might be achieved, but he was prepared to stop at nothing in order to bring it about. In moments of alcoholism he had gone to the lengths of murder and sat gleefully under the hideous reality of day dreams in which he had seen Tony lying dead at his feet. A good riddance to bad rubbish. So no wonder Chrissie was frightened.

In Sherwood's case heredity, of course, played just

as strong a part as it did in the case of Tony. You see, the elder Sherwood had been a not unusual mixture of Methodist and rogue, a successful cheat who had practised a long series of brilliant duplicities alongside a perfectly sincere religious fanaticism. On borrowed money he had bought a prosperous grocer's shop in a thriving suburb in which he had established himself as a lay preacher. By giving false weight and palming off inferior articles at top prices he had gradually succeeded in paying off his indebtedness to his spinster cousin. After that, the sailing being easy, he had succeeded, shop by shop in establishing the ring which made the name of Samuel Sherwood a household word in English suburbs, cheating in every one and becoming as widely known as a fiery preacher as he was as a universal provider of tea and eggs, butter and lard, jam and treacle. A hard and cruel man who had dangled Hell in front of wrongdoers while he built up a hell for himself, he had crushed all joy out of the life of his wretched wife, and taught his son how to hate. It was from this man, laid low finally by an incurable disease, that Teddy Sherwood had inherited his cunning, his cruelty, the fag-end of a religious mania that kept him from what he called rotting about, and from his loveless home that overwhelming desire to be loved which made him a menace to Chrissie and an evil spirit who hovered hawk-like over Tony's good-natured head.

V

But it was not until the night of the house-warming in their new and fantastic quarters that Tony produced

his father's chart, and gave to the vindictive Sherwood the germ of a murderous silence.

The old gang was in force there. Lady George Cornish with her insistent voice, her rhubarb coloured hair,* many yards of velvet, enough cheap jewellery to make a good showing in the window of a pawn-broker's shop, and the usual trail of fallen aitches; Algernon Lumley, the perfect gentleman, suave, graceful, and white; Mortimer Pollock, grown fatter and more oily in his inky prosperity; Orlando Blythe, the actor, who had been saved from the Thames by the Pictures to which he was occasionally valuable as the needy father of hard-working heroines. All were there. To whom had been added the heaven-sent clerk from the Metropole, with the inevitable gardenia, Major Wagstaffe, happy in being able to provide his wife and children with bread if not with butter as one of the sheep dogs who herded together the straying tourists of a travel agency on a four-day scamper through Switzerland—poor Switzerland; unfortunate Wagstaffe; Colonel Vivian Bultitude with the squeaking cork leg, who had at last got a job as a floorwalker in the ready-made clothing department of Pope Brothers on the strength of his gift of making such things appear to be worth their price; and the beautiful Mrs. Worthing, one of Murray's professional dancers, who had taken a Cornish bedroom in which she slept all day.

The reason that these rooms were fantastic was because they had been the shrine of a poet, a young person named Ivor Wympage, who had escaped what he called that lamentable orgy by being too young for the drag-net,* and who, with far too much money, had come down from Cambridge a year after the

Armistice. The place was furnished inspirationally, therefore. Every room had in it something to start a vibration, to rattle a nerve, to ruffle a pool of colour. Every hanging was intended to suggest a sonnet, every nude picture a loose verse, every pot a rhythm. It was frightfully self-conscious.

And it had had an extraordinary effect on Lady George. "Oh la la," she had said on her liner entrance. "Squirt me with the essence of lilies and give me a dart to jerk! . . . My 'at, Tony, who's the little darling you followed into this?" And she had set everybody into agonies of laughter with an elephantine attempt to mince about the sitting-room, with wriggling shoulders and splayed out hands.

And Chrissie had most thoroughly agreed with her, throwing her mind back into Panton Street, with its sanity and jolly commonplace.

As for Pollock, having recovered and smoothed his bulging shirt, he had summed the whole thing up in the one word "Mercurey," and started a fat cigar.

Michael Angelo had been lent by Sherwood to serve the dinner from a near-by caterer's, and as it was a good one with a large assortment of wines everyone was in excellent humour on the return to the sitting-room. Especially Orlando Blythe, the actor, who, resting at the moment, had provisioned himself for the next day's harbourless voyage like a wary mariner. What a thrill of admiration he must have given to all the shades of Drury Lane as, taking on the colour of his surroundings, he swayed in from R.U.E. with a Byronic eyebrow and a Tenlysonian scowl.

Lady George went straight to the piano which had driven Sherwood frantic, and with a splodge of eye-black

on the tip of a marshmallow nose began singing "Not for Joe, oh no, no," which, for some Freudian reason, had come into her mind out of the rag-bag of her childhood. She meant well, but her performance was disrupting. And Chrissie, in her kindness, though she felt that she was playing hostess in someone else's house, encouraged her from one prehistoric ditty to another, until all the Wympage trimmings blanched with pain. Although it completely killed Mortimer Pollock's efforts to impress his brilliancy upon Lily Worthing, who lay like one upon an Oriental divan, slender and green, gave Wagstaffe a stabbing attack of toothache, and made the harassed clerk long for the comparative silence of the Metropole, the concert went on and on. "Champagne Charley is ma name" was followed by "Don't make a noise or else you'll wake the baby." And even "Ta-ra-ra-boom-de-ay" was dragged out of a deservedly dead past. It was appalling.

"Oh my God," cried Sherwood, who had an ear for music, "let's go into the den and get away from this ghastly racket." He beckoned to Pollock, who came with gratitude, and shut the door with a bang.

And as he did so, Chrissie, who knew that Tony was there, felt the pricking of gooseflesh all the way up her spine. Her beloved Tony had severely punished the wine at dinner, was in the mood for confidences, and might, therefore, forget her pleadings never to explain the chart. With her peculiar intuition she had all along associated that chart and Paradise with trouble, linked it to Sherwood, and worked her magical influence over Tony to keep the subject of his father's letter banked behind reserve. Tragedy and the island seemed to go hand in hand.

If only she could find an excuse to break in, mount guard over Tony, and put herself once more between Sherwood and her man.

All the Panton Street books and photographs were in that slip of a room, and although, like the rest of the apartment, it was hung with nudes, it possessed something that was undoubtedly a desk, chairs that were healthily Maple, and a window that gave on to the unpoetic street. At a first glance it had seemed possible to Chrissie. Given a quiet hour she intended to make it a retreat for herself and Tony, an oasis in the desert of sham. First of all those nudes must come down because, being decent, she had an inherent objection to the female form defined. And, after all, it is only occasionally beautiful.

"Excellent," said Pollock. "Now I can hear myself talk." He chose the most comfortable chair, putting his feet on another. "How long are you going to continue driving for the Metropole, Tony?"

"For the rest of my life," said Tony, "so far as I can see." He laughed, looking perfectly pleased with himself and lit a well-smoked pipe.

And Sherwood, darting a malicious look, told himself that a most unholy smash would be a very welcome thing.

"Shan't you make any sort of effort to better yourself, my friend?"

"What's the use?" asked Tony. "I can't do any other peace time job. You see, my education was distressingly interfered with by my ejection from Eton, and my inability to conform with the rules and regulations of Oxford. And even if I had come into the world with a staid spirit and served my full time in both those homes of culture, I should be just

as uneducated as I am now. I haven't the faculty of learning. I'm an absolute dud with books. I don't even know a blessed thing about engines, but by the grace of God I can drive. So there you are, you see. I'm jolly thankful for this work, I don't mind saying, and I shall carry on with the utmost care until I receive a polite chit asking me to be so kind as to serve my King and country in the next war. And then I shall nip in quick and drop the first gas. Chrissie's keeping the moths away from my uniform. Good old Chris!"

"But there won't be another real war for five or six years," said Pollock, reverting without shame to his old rôle of prophet. "Not because there aren't enough men all over the world to take up arms again—as a matter of fact there are thousands like yourself—but simply and solely because the cushy little gentlemen who hold the political reins are quite unable to interest finance in that direction just at present. But as soon as Germany permits herself to recover after a long period of feigned bankruptcy behind which she will put her house in complete order, then will be your chance. She will sell her soul to possess Paris."

"Oh well, I shall have to wait," said Tony. "Unless, of course, Americans come over in increasing numbers. Then, hoarding tips, I may be able, after a brilliant season, to dash off at a tangent."

"Oh? Start a car of your own, do you mean?"

"Oh Lord no," said Tony, with a flash in his eye and extended nostrils. "Nothing at all like that." His hand itched to lay hold of the chart.

The false notes and the pathetic screaming were by no means muffled by the thinish wall. Sherwood

writhed again, his nerves all flying, and covered his ears with his hands. "What a cursed idiot I was not to have had that piano carted away," he cried out. "I ought to have remembered that Kitty loves tosing."

"Poor old soul. Why shouldn't she? She never can do it at home."

"Why not?" asked Pollock. "Does Lumley threaten to divorce her? Amateur singing is worse than unfaithfulness. Or is there no piano in Hill Street among that welter of furniture?"

"That's it," said Tony.

"Ta-ra-ra-Boom"

Sherwood sprang to his feet in his horror. "If that damn row goes on," he said, "I'll start a counter irritant. I'll set the infernal house on fire." He would have put his head up the chimney if it hadn't been for the guard.

Pollock was naturally only fairly sympathetic. He was very economical of sympathy, keeping it altogether for himself. "What would you have done if, like me at one time of my career, you'd hitched your wagon to a musical comedy star, who practised from time to time?"

"Cut my throat or gone to live on an island."

Island! The word touched a spring in Tony's heart. Forgetting Chrissie's strange request to keep his father's letter dark, he went to the desk, opened a drawer and brought it out with a flourish. Like a woman with a secret, a boy with a new toy, he had longed to show it off. "If you want to know what I mean by a tangent," he said excitedly, "you might like to listen to this."

Ta-ra-ra-Boom

"That? Why? What is it? Anything to be

amused," said Pollock, and made a long arm for the cigar box.

Whereupon, standing with his back to the mantelpiece as every Englishman does, Tony read old Lord Stirling's letter and then displayed the chart.

"What about that?" he asked. "The King and Queen of Paradise incognito. Those are your hosts to-night." And with a photograph smile and a mandarin head he turned from side to side as though passing through a cheering crowd.

For the first time since Lady George's claim to attention Sherwood was under control. He listened to the reading with fixed and eager interest, the worm in his brain active. God, was this the way to work things, to make one more widow in the land?

"Um. Quite charming," said Pollock, running a finger up and down the bridge of his nose, as he did when a play was good, a scandal succulent, or a woman strangely enchanting. "Might be rather worth while--that island. Nitrates, perhaps. Oil, possibly. Cocoanuts, of course."

"Ah," said Tony with exultation, his face alight, his heart pounding. The island, the island. It called him, it caught his spirit, it made him homesick. Pollock had money to pay for the journey back to the good old days! And by jove, there was Sherwood deeply examining the chart. He had been given a brain wave. He had obeyed a hunch. Hadn't he asked Chrissie to watch him? Things were moving. She should reign in Paradise yet.

Pollock asked for the letter and read it all over again. "How characteristically Scotch, to funk having his leg pulled by a lawyer for an unaccountable burst of romance. Don't suppose it was a very

extravagant purchase either, all those years ago. A master of cynicism, that old devil. Pardon me, Fortescue. *De mortuis nil nisi bonum*, eh?"

"Without the smallest doubt," said Tony. "Whatever the dickens it means. Do you wonder I called that a tangent? Pollock, if you could see me at night gazing at that chart thing, transported from the place I sit into that . . . that freedom, that kingdom, that sunlit spot of childish people, needing a leader, a white Chief, understanding human nature, giving kindness, doing stunts, winning loyalty, devising improvements but doing nothing to spoil. to missionize, attending binges, gaining confidences . . ." Something came to his throat.

"Yes, and as your mordant parent said, levying taxes . . ." Pollock laughed heartily. Anything to be amused, he had said, charmed that others should work when he indulged in leisure. But this—why this was more than amusing. It was delightful. A novelty. A refreshing splash of Conrad, Stevenson. Better than a chapter from a novel because, by God, the thing was true. The letter was alive with the old man's emotions—wounded pride at having such a son, anger, scorn, bitter sarcasm, the wistful and pathetic reminder of a first and only love . . . and there *was* the chart, roughly but accurately drawn with a Scotch hand, showing where the fiefs of possession had waited all those years to be adventured after, to give the owner not only all that Tony had said, which was merely a matter of temperament, throw-back stuff, but, by God again, profits, eh what? If not, why not? Nitrates did come from such places, he knew vaguely. Coral and other things

But before he could make a proposition, an offer

to finance a voyage of discovery—a holiday badly needed—Teddy got in. He was not a chip of the old block for nothing. He had been seeing things, tangible things. He didn't give a curse for the island as such, but he thought very highly indeed of it as a means to a more and more to be desired end.

He looked up quickly from the chart, covering all that with a business expression, the grocer's look. "Now then," he said, "when would you like to have a dash at this place—a bachelor party—the two of us——"

"Good God," cried Tony, hardly trusting his ears. "You don't—Teddy, you don't really mean . . ."

"Yes I do. Of course I do. Why not?" He was quiet and firm, not eager, not pressing; glad to experiment, glad to be able to do a good turn for a pal. "How soon can you start?"

"Yes, and I'm in this," said Pollock. Damned trademen. How nippy they were.

Tony felt that he was walking on air. His mirage was consolidating at last. "Any time. To-morrow. The day after. That is if they can get a joker to fill my place. I'd hardly like to put them in the cart." A touch of the old man there.

"A thousand men in a queue," said Sherwood. "You know that."

"Well then, how about the end of the week? I can wind up with style—hand over as per R.A.F. Teddy, my dear old Teddy, is it possible that you're going to do this thing for me—right off the bat like this? What a wonderful chap you are. It's almost too good to be true." And he put his arms round Sherwood in that winning way of his and danced him about the room, laughing and laughing, but with

something like a sob. Damn it, was it an everyday affair for a poor devil who had been born four hundred years too late to find his period ?

The man who had been taught to hate by his father submitted to the touch of his enemy.

And then Chrissie flung open the door and stood wide-eyed and pale.

"Chris, Chris," said Tony. "Didn't I tell you to watch me ? Didn't I ? Well, I've done it. The island's mine. Teddy's going to take us there—good old Teddy, the little friend of all the world. Would you ever have guessed it ?"

Yes, she had guessed it. There was no need for Tony to tell her, to see the chart spread out. There had been something suspiciously boyish in his voice. She had heard it through the wall at the moment when Kitty Cornish had lost her breath. The island and tragedy—they seemed to go hand in hand.

"Hold on there. 'Us' is the wrong word," said Sherwood quietly. "I said a bachelor party, y'know. And that means you and me."

"And me, if you remember," said Pollock. "I'm in this, if you please."

But Chrissie went up to Tony and put her arms round his neck. "Where you go, I go," she said.

"Hell," said Sherwood, inside him, both at the sight and the sentiment. "That knocks the bottom out of the whole damned business."

VI

Next morning, however, after a sleepless night, Sherwood let himself into the shrine of Wympage

early enough to catch Tony before he left for the Metropole. He had arrived at a plan.

As he stood, bandy-legged and white-faced in the sitting-room, among the stale reminders of last night's party—a Pollock cigar butt on the foot of a disgusted Venus, a half finished tumbler of whiskey and soda against the bulging stomach of a Chinese god, splodges of cigarette ash on the rug by the divan on which the Lily had laid so greenly and slim, he could hear Tony whistling in the bath and Chrissie putting the plates ready for breakfast in the dining room. Had she been *his* wife, either in a pompous house in Berkeley Square, or a lovely place in the country stamped with the arms of a peace taxed Peer, with servants, and horses, and dresses, pearls as big as birds' eggs, nothing to do . . .

Well, all this was appearing on the cards. It was only a matter of tactics, of patience, and of the Sherwood cunning with its mixture of fanaticism. "I've waited a long time and I can go on waiting," he said to himself, "now that I see the way. A man who can chuck a certainty to go in chase of a silly island, to place such a wife among natives to live on cocoanut milk, throwing over all civilization in one fell swoop, is not the husband for Chrissie, and is better out of the way. It's a mission, that's what it is; not a murder. It's a crusade, not a criminal action. It's my job, my duty, and by God it's my cause."

He stood in the room that was airless and sour without opening the window or letting up the blinds. He had his nose to a line like a hen, and all his father's tenacious capacity for holding on to a purpose.

And then, finally, following the smartly dressed

chauffeur into a dining room, the decoration of which was calculated to take away the appetite of any normal man, he leaned against the door and nodded and said "Good morning." Chrissie wouldn't have worn that old pink dressing gown if things had gone *his* way before the War.

Old it was, certainly, but being as clean as everything with which Chrissie had to do, and a nice colour, it suited her well, and emphasized the glory of her hair, that flower face with its little tilted nose, and eyes as true as beacons. Worried eyes that morning, though they had their invariable glow for Tony. He had slept all night with his head on her shoulder, inspecting his island in dreams.

"Oh, hullo Teddy," he said, waving his hand. "Come and have some eggs and bacon and a cup of Chrissie's coffee. Can't be beat."

Sherwood shook his head but gave an unfamiliar smile. "I'll tell you what," he said. "We're only just into September and the weather is likely to be good. And as Chrissie insists on coming with us to the island and Pollock makes a point of it, I've decided to go in for a party and take Kitty Cornish and Lumley. May as well. What do you think?" He was competing with the general good nature.

"Immense," said Tony. "I'd love them to see my place. Send them back with a few mementoes. It'll probably be a pretty long time before we shall see 'em again." He glanced at his watch and put some cold milk in his coffee. War training had revolutionized his old ideas of punctuality, like many other things.

And Chrissie buttered his toast. He must have a good meal to start his work on. She firmly believed in that.

"All right, then," said Sherwood. Decide what you want and you shall have it was his tone.

"But how are we going to get there, old boy?"

"I'm going to commission a yacht."

"A yacht!"

"Yes, there are plenty going these times and pretty cheap at that. Muster a crew by raising a finger. It's the easiest and most private way. A holiday for us all. Don't you think so?"

"Think so? I should jolly well say I do. Perfectly great. Gorgeous. Chrissie'll love it, too. She needs a flip of the sea after the summer in London. Thanks most awfully, Teddy. You're certainly doing us proud."

And Chrissie gave him another egg and two more slices of bacon. "There's quite enough time," she said Wendily.

Which was agony to Sherwood, though it drove the nails more firmly in his purpose. "See you to-night, then," he said breezily. "I'm going to spend the day with yacht brokers. No time to waste. I'll have something to show you after dinner. Don't forget to put in your notice. You must be free by the end of the week."

"Right O," said Tony. "Best of luck, old son."

And Sherwood nodded again, with just one look at Chrissie—the desire, the hunger, the jealousy—all of which she read.

And with his head bent over his plate and a loyal desire to do full justice to Chrissie's efforts, Tony talked as he ate. "This is how Teddy was during the show," he said admiringly. "When he got hold of a good thing he put his shoulder to it and shoved over. Nothing stopped him. Extraordinary how

much better he is, too, under this diversion. As soon as I read the letter and gave him the chart to inspect he clicked on and became as calm as a pond. It's awfully satisfactory to know that I'm doing him almost as good a turn as the one he's doing for me—for us. Six minutes more and I must nip."

She gave him one more piece of toast. "Yes," she said, "it is."

Tony gave a laugh and pushed the plate away. "I can't take on another ounce of cargo, old girl. Honestly."

"Oh yes. Just that. You may have to miss your lunch to-day."

"Well . . . And he tackled it, just to oblige. And then he sprang to his feet, and flung his arms out. "Who'd have thought that all this has happened just because poor old Kitty screamed?"

The irony of it lay in the fact that she might have been content with "Not for Joe" if Chrissie hadn't encouraged her sympathetically to continue. She brushed the cap and polished its peak. "I've never seen more of the sea than the channel," she said, "and I didn't much care for that." It was her first attempt at a protest.

"Yes, but it looks very different from the deck of a yacht," said Tony. "We'll have the time of our lives."

She knelt down to shine up a dull spot on his gaiter. "Aren't you rather afraid you'll hanker after London, theatres, and cabarets, all the old things?"

"But my dear old thing," said Tony, "we're not going to a desert island, y'know. The place teems with life and movement, gorgeous sunsets, bewildering colours"

"Mosquitoes?" she put in quietly.

"I dunno. Probably yes. But . . . Good Lord, Chris, you're not weakening, are you?"

"Oh no, Tony," she said. "It doesn't matter where I live so long as I'm with you. I was only wondering . . . I mean, you've been so long in London, you like bathrooms, and music, table napkins, a proper place for clothes . . ."

He laughed and picked her up. "When in Rome," he said. "You know the rest. But as Uncle Alan told the Governor I'm a misfit in London, a throw-back, though I'm dashed if I ever knew anything about heredity. I could only feel that I was wrong. But wait till we get to the island among my people, with the clock turned back. It's my chance. Oh God, it's my chance—better than the one the War gave, because it'll go on and on. Leadership, don't you see? And I have that they tell me. Chieftain stuff, Chris, as the old man said. Humanitarianism. The winning smile thing. How can I put it?"

"You haven't got to put it to me, Tony. I know."

"Well then, you aren't shying off, are you? You're not afraid of being bored? Tell me, and I'll chuck the whole thing without a single regret and carry on with the car. Good God, I owe you that, Chris, and heaps besides. I love you, my sweetheart, my luck-penny. I won't do a damn thing that you don't want me to. That's my scheme. That's the incitement you gave me when you came into my arms in the rooms next door. Don't you know that, Chris?"

And she said again "Where you go I go. It's the island then." And she looked at his wrist watch and added bravely, "Nip."

He picked her up in the usual way and kissed her, and was out of the house like a flash.

Whereupon, locking the front door against the possible intrusion of Sherwood, Chrissie returned to the dining room and sat down in chaos, with the world all tumbling about her.

VII

But it was not in the nature of Chrissie Bunning to make herself a target for the shafts and arrows of outrageous fortune. Resilience was hers as well as indomitable courage. She had been brought up to be thankful for small mercies, to make a little butter go a long way, and to imagine that she could hear the rustle of country leaves when she stood with closed eyes beneath the wash line on the tenement roof. Wasn't she the daughter of a man who had driven a two-horse bus through London traffic and a woman who had gone on scrubbing, without a grumble, until she had fallen into the grave?

"Up you get, my dear," she said, springing out of chaos and ignoring bruises. "There's work to do, and you must do it. If Tony wants the island so do you."

The eggs were cold and the bacon soggy. It didn't matter. They were good fresh eggs and the bacon was "superfine." She had chosen it herself. And as she made a hearty breakfast, enjoying the coffee which Tony always praised, she deliberately turned out of the shadows of her deep depression and chose the sunny side of a cheerful line of thought. Then she cleared away, washed up, made everything ship-shape, flung up the windows in the sour sitting-room.

and after one long look of wholesome contempt at everything Wympage, went briskly into the dressing room, with pencil and paper, to make a list of Tony's island requirements. She always made a list. It was a fetish.

The familiar rhythm of her beloved London touched, during the process, a regretful note. Island sounds would be strange and different, that was certain. But she would get used to them in the course of time for Tony's sake. (Two pairs of flannel trousers, three new buttons needed; one with a hole in the seat.) And the thought of the open sea on a yacht all the way to South Sea Islands, wherever they were, gave twinges of dread and sickness. But how absurd and selfish, when Tony would be ecstatic, with a quickly-tanning face. (One thin, blue flannel jacket, two white bone buttons missing; one severely worn Harris tweed golf coat which would do for weekdays; two quite nice light grey suits the spots on which could be easily removed; buy a tin of Benzine.) And it was nice to know that Mortimer Pollock would be in the party, and probably dear old Lady George and the Colonel. They would help to make a hedge between Tony and Teddy Sherwood—Teddy Sherwood, the ever recurring thought of whom brought back gooseflesh and an indefinable fear. (Nine soft white shirts in good condition; wash them to-morrow and see to buttons; one pair tennis shoes, buy a tin of Blanco, two caps; a sufficiency of ties.) What could he do, that strange man, who loved her just as much as when he'd come on tour and seen to baggage and scenery and wired ahead for rooms and bought her flowers, and gone so mad at times? What could he do when she belonged to Tony, heart and

soul, and Tony was so strong and confident, protected by her prayers ?

Finally, list in hand, her bank book, and a glow of satisfaction at the knowledge that the amount of hard-won savings would buy whatever else he required to make a good impression on the natives, who were, she deeply trusted, both men and women, unlike the Wypage gallery in that disturbing flat. (Go to the nearest public library and look up South Sea Islands, four o'clock.)

Her own clothes, suitable for tropics ? Oh well, she would take her sewing machine along, buy the right sort of material at a sale, and make what dresses were essential in the hut. Hut ? Why not ? Hadn't she made even Panton Street a show place, with elbow grease, imagination, and chintz ? (Pack photographs, all favourite books, tobacco jar, and Tony's pipes.) And uniform ? Um. But wait a minute. Didn't the best part of that island lie in the fact that they wouldn't be able to get Tony for another war ? (Pack uniform, a mere memento.) A splendid thought. It cheered her vastly. It sent her spirits up to eighty in the shade. It was a good wind after all. . . . But for Sherwood—Teddy Sherwood. Why—why had he jumped so quickly at this island trip, dashed out to find a yacht, eyed her so queerly, thrown off illness, broken up at once his plan to have them near him, with both the flats on his hands at such high rents ?

"Never mind," she thought standing squarely with her chin high, "Tony must have his island, win his dream, be Chieftain. He wants it. That's enough. You and me against the world," he said. "And this is love."

That was Chrissie—good old Chris !

VIII

Tony's orders for the day were light ones. "Morning—take two ladies to shop in Bond Street and give them two or three turns round the Park before lunch. Afternoon take same, 2.30 sharp to leave paste-boards on their friends after soothing drive. Home by 5.45. Evening free."

"Fine," said Tony, having read the typewritten chit. "Young or old?"

Williams smelt his gardenia and gave a grin. "Twenies, old boy, one a widow, the other out to grass. Good customers from the Midlands. Meals in sitting-room, wine list lunch and dinner. Spending freely. No complaints. Cheery words for attendants. V.M.L."

"What's that?" asked Tony, who, being an outside man, had no knowledge of indoor codes.

"Very much liked," said Williams. "Not letters used as frequently as they jolly well ought to be. It's extraordinary how many people there are who come to hotels and think they've bought the souls as well as bodies of everybody for the price of a couple of rooms. We put 'em down as H.A.N."

"Meaning?"

"Hard as nuts. They're the sort of people who sneak out without tipping the head waiter, the bedroom maid, and the lift man and pinch pens and notepaper, and a towel or two. D.D.'s we call 'em unofficially, which stands for dirty dogs. How's the wife?"

"As fit as a fiddle," said Tony. "Thanks very much. Good old Chris."

"You're right," said Williams. "By gum, how

I used to love to see her on the stage. Sissie-Chrissie—they drew me, *I tell you*. An awful blow when Sissie went and died. I never go to the Coliseum now without wishing they were there. You're in luck, Tony."

"Don't I know it, George?" His name was Osbert, but Tony had carried out of the Service the old habit of calling everybody George. It was all the same to Osbert.

"By the way, thanks most muchly for that excellent dinner last night. But, tell me. Lady George Cornish—does she give voice at every party that she goes to? If so, forgive my asking, but aren't her invitations rather scarce?"

Tony's laugh made a six-foot safe quiver, and brought an answering smile to the worn face of a telephone girl. "I'm frightfully sorry," he said. "It was just a little trying. But she's the epitome of kindness and one has to let her go. There were times before the War when a good many of us would have crawled into bed hungry but for her great thoughtfulness. D.G.S. are the letters against her name in the book of the Recording Angel, I'll bet my shirt on that. Damned good sort, I mean."

Williams nodded. "Those are the ones that you've made, according to everybody here."

"Oh, that's pleasing," said Tony. "Life's short and I do the best I can. By Jove, that reminds me, George, with immense gratitude to you for having got me here and kept me out of parades. I'm afraid I must ask you to find another joker to fill my place, if you don't mind, from Saturday night."

"What? You're leaving?" Williams was most genuinely upset and disappointed. "What a rotten shame. What are you going in for now, then?"

"King stuff, if all goes well," and his smile would have swept away a fog.

Williams was puzzled. "What do you mean? Been appointed equerry or Lord of the Bed Chamber, or something?" Why not? There wasn't anything too good for Tony Fortescue, the Wing Commander who had given so much consideration to the comfort of his men. By gum, it had made a difference. He had been one, too, who had never sent up his youngsters to a certain death because he didn't like them. He had gone up himself, and with the help of some good spirit, come duly back. Wonderful fellow, Tony. A born leader of men.

"Good heavens, no," said Tony. "King stuff is a private joke of mine that will take too long to explain. What I ought to have said was that I have had a patch of earth left to me in the South Sea Islands, and when I've found out where the deuce they are—my geography's rocky—I'm off to take it over and start my reign."

Suddenly called away to attend to business, the breezy Williams left Tony in the vestibule waiting to clinch his notice. He looked about him with a reminiscent eye. He had stayed at the old Metropole once or twice in pre-war days, when times had been briefly good and a rank outsider had passed the post at very long odds. He had liked it then with its red carpets and comfort, and remembered Flossy, that beauty in the bar. Dear little soul. She had been one of the nurses who had been killed in Flanders in an air raid, and he had not been the only one of her many friends to drop a tear at her passing. The hotel had blushed into a second youth since it had been commandeered by the Government as an office,

and was now all aglow with new paint and carpets, busy and cheerful and bright.

Someone said "Good morning," uncordially.

Tony turned and saluted. It was his brother passing out, Alexander, twelfth Earl of Stirling. Was he still trying to let the Castle and so pay for his son to go to Eton? If he turned out a good boy he might be given a job on the Island. Highlanders must stand shoulder to shoulder. Tony was amused at the thought.

"Well, then, George," he said when Williams came out of the office. "You accept my notice, don't you, given with the deepest appreciation of your kindness, which has kept me on my feet." He held out his hand.

Williams took it with a noticeable emotion. "All right, Tony," he said. "And when I say that I am damned sorry that you have to leave us I am voicing what will be the feeling of every man and woman in the building. Good luck, old boy."

"Good luck to you, George. May your gardenia never turn black."

"Here come your ladies."

And so it was with half crushed fingers but a sense of exaltation that Tony hurried out to the Daimler to carry out the orders of the day.

The Island, the Island. King stuff—the revolution of a misfit—Paradise.

IX

"Come over to my place," said Sherwood that evening, standing once more in the doorway of the

Wympage dining-room. "Things are moving. I told you that I would have something to show you, and I have."

His excitement was catching. And so tucking the tiny Chrissie under one arm, Tony carried her across the tiled passage, laughing, and put her on her feet in Sherwood's hall.

It was something after ten. Chrissie had enjoyed the pleasure of feeding Tony at a family meal, after having gone over her morning's list with him, her afternoon's work with buttons and benzine, to his vast and articulate admiration of her supreme efficiency. Impatience for news had kept Tony on tenter-hooks from the moment of his return from work, and it was only with great difficulty that he had been able to control himself sufficiently to wait for a call from Sherwood, according to the instructions delivered by Michael Angelo.

But, at last, the moment had come, and judging by the clatter of tongues in Sherwood's dining-room it was going to be shared by the members of the excursion. Lady George, in a flapper's hat and a skirt of pathetic shortness, was standing, glass in hand as usual, talking through Mortimer Pollock's attempted dissertation on native life, while Lumley, stirred out of smiling silence, was talking over them both. It was like an argument between games of Bridge.

No one took the slightest notice of Tony and Chrissie, and the babble would have continued *ad infinitum* if Sherwood hadn't thumped on the table in the manner of a toastmaster, demanding silence, with a grin.

There was a touch of colour on his face, at that

moment, an astonishing revival of an interest in life. The neglected plant had been watered. The martyr had descended from the altar. The inferiority complex had been excited away.

"Well, ladies and gentlemen," he said, "having explained the reason of the voyage and won your acceptance of my invitation to join the trip, all that remains now is to show you how I intend to make it and on what." He paused for breath.

Whereupon, of course, Pollock took the floor. "On what," he said, sententiously, being a dramatic critic. "There's only one way to get to the South Sea Islands. I spent an hour at Cook's this afternoon. By aeroplane to France"

"Not for Joe," cried Lady George. "Can yer see my fourteen stone being wobbled across the Channel in a fit?"

"Why not the boat from Dover," said Lumley, "a comfortable train with a restaurant ear to Paris"

"Hopeless," said Pollock, "completely out of date. Now"

But Sherwood thumped again. "My way or no way," he said, in a most uncharacteristic good temper. "This is my show, I'd have you remember. The principals in the matter have left it all to me."

"Rather," said Tony. "I should think we have indeed."

"Of course," said Chrissie. "Very gratefully, too."

"There you are," said Sherwood. "So let all arguments cease. If I'd wanted any advice from Cook's I could have got it. As it is I'd like you to follow me."

And with a curiously gleeful chuckle he led the

way to the door of his sitting-room. It was closed, and when he threw it open nothing was to be seen, because all the lights were out. The wondering group, at the door, murmuring, heard him fumble his hand along the wall to a switch. A most beautiful and surprising sight resulted.

Standing on a table against the darkness was a four-foot model of a graceful yacht of lovely lines; sea-worthy even in the sight of a land lubber. There were lights in all its portholes, head and stern lights. She might have been steaming quietly through a breathless night.

No one said a word. There wasn't a movement.

Poor old Lady George stood open-mouthed, almost tearful, gazing. In all her life she had never been to foreign places, heard strange tongues, stood thrilled before the beauty of old cathedrals, and had never hoped to realize her winging dreams. And the emotion and nerve rack of long war years in London, the terror of air-raids, the daily accumulation of sights that had wrung her heart, strained her spirit, broken her temper, these had so often in the last few months made her pine for a change of scene, sent her imagination out on such a yacht as that.

Pollock and Lumley, who had both been tied to the deadly humdrum of the city streets, the former a slave to the ink pot, the latter at the mercy of an exacting wife, stood under enchantment, smelling ozone, sensing freedom, feeling the vibration of exemplary engines, outward bound.

As for Tony, riveted, stirred too deeply to break the spell, he saw in this vessel the incarnation of a wistful hope, the only means, the very miracle, that would lift him out of his defective present and place him back in his appropriate past.

But Chrissie, if she hadn't immediately clapped her hand across her mouth, would have cried out "Oh God, I'm frightened. I see nothing good about this ship. It will take us to tragedy, bloodshed, awful regrets, keep us too close to Teddy Sherwood." And so she stood trembling, and presently buried her face against Tony's arm.

Then, having gained the dramatic effect that he had arranged with meticulous care, the triumphant Sherwood turned up all the lights in the room and brought his party down to earth.

"Something like, eh?" he asked proudly. "A young liner, that's what she is. Well, I've got her—commissioned her, that's the word. She's lying at Southampton, everything ship-shape. Been there since the Armistice. Was used in the War for some purpose or other. I didn't care, so I didn't ask. She's owned by Sir William Sidecup who, you bet, is glad to let her. It's a staggering price, but I'm not grumbling. May as well pay for a damned good beno while I'm at it, eh?"

They crowded round the model, peering into her port-holes, fingering her shining hulk, examining her bridge and life boats, amazed, like children, to find her decks deserted, the sudden disappearance of the illusion of sea.

Questions, never answered, flew like gulls from side to side. How many men did she require? How many knots did she make? Which was port and which was starboard? How did one go down stairs? Where, after all, were the South Sea Islands? On and on.

If they had had the patience to listen to Pellock, who had spent several hours with maps and the

encyclopedia, they would have taken home to bed the most exact information on all these points—distances, ports, definitions, climates, the history of the Islands, the customs and character of the natives, trade winds, currents, the equator. He had a remarkable memory, and even without a billiard cue, a table and a glass of water, was prepared to deliver a lecture such as would have done credit to an old sea-dog.

Finally, the call of the whiskey bottle made itself heard, and Lady George led the way into the dining room. But not before she had drawn the reluctant Sherwood into an exuberant embrace, crying out, "You funny little three star Teddy. Kiss yer old Auntie, boy. And, oh my Lord, doesn't it do the 'eart good to run across somebody who's got a bit of money to spend these days!"

It was a wonderful evening.

X

But it did not end at that point.

Sherwood remained in the sitting-room, gloating over the yacht and the use to which he intended to put it. Very simple. Not in the least messy. Tony, encouraged to drink too much, would be invited to take the air before turning in. A dull night, choppy, starless, everybody below. A sudden grapple, a heave, a splash. All over . . . A penniless widow. Time, the healer. Marriage. That was the programme.

But, having made up her mind that something had been marked out to happen either on the voyage or the island, Chrissie turned at the door, shut it, and

went back. She felt that this was the moment to plant a definite and unarguable fact in the disordered mind of this man which would hamstring whatever plan he had made for his enduring revenge. She could see no other reason for his having seized that opportunity for getting the man he hated out to sea. And, in taking her courage in both hands, she instinctively reverted to her accent of the old music hall days, the days before Tony, because she knew that Sherwood liked that better than the one that she had now acquired. It was to be a matching of wits.

Why had she shut the door? Was she going to attempt to throw a wrench into the machinery? It was she who, to Sherwood's bitter annoyance, was responsible for the party on the yacht. What was her idea now?

"Will yer give me a moment, Teddy?"

"I'll give you everything I've got and work for the rest," he said, with the old craving.

She had expected that. She had only to be out of earshot of Tony or anyone else and the volcano bubbled. Thank Heaven for the sound of voices. "If you haven't lost ther habit of tellin' ther truth will yer tell me somethin' now?"

"It's not an easy habit to break," he replied. "I'll tell you what I know."

But he began to disconnect the electric wires from the model in order to keep his eyes from hers. This was *his* Chrissie speaking, the old Chrissie. His mind went back to the lodgings in Liverpool and Manchester, Edinburgh and Glasgow, stage doors, railway stations on Sunday mornings, train journeys, lunch baskets, favour, hope.

"Well then, what are yer doin' all this 'ere for?"

"All what?"

"Ther yacht, ther voyage, all of it?"

"For Tony's sake, of course."

"But you don't like Tony any better than yer used ter do. You hate him. That's ther truth."

"Half the truth," he said. "I'll own up to hate for his having killed my chance. No more than that. There was no man in the R.A.F. with whom I was so thankful to serve."

She sprang at him suddenly, turned him round, and forced him to give her his eyes. "What are yer goin' ter do to 'im? Come on now. Answer that."

"Do to him?" He laughed quite easily, much amused. "I don't know what you mean."

She gripped his arms, her head bent forward, the tey look on her face. "I'm looking straight into your soul," she said. "You can't dodge me."

Her touch, her nearness, bewildered him, sent his blood flying, made his heart stumble. But the whole success of his costly scheme depended upon lies, acting, the most careful waiting game. He had not gone off his head for nothing. And so he laughed again.

"Why this drama, Chrissie? My soul's open to inspection if you can find it. Look as much as you like."

"I want an answer," she said.

He beamed at her with all his cunning alert. "I ought to have said that this will give me a chance for a holiday, a change of scene, new interests. I thought that went without saying. You've seen how I am. And so when I said I'm doing it for Tony I included myself and you and the others. Everyone's

keen, and somehow we all seem to be hitched up together. Your precious Tony's as safe as the rest."

He seemed to be perfectly normal, open, and frank.

He would have baffled a brain specialist—and Chrissie was only a girl.

But a girl of intuition, a knowledge of Sherwood, a memory of ugly moments, a great protecting love. And though baffled by this man's calmness and amusement, she kept her hold of his arms and gave him something to keep.

"Where you go I go, you heard me say last night to Tony, and I shall always say it. It's my faith, my religion. And if anything happens to Tony it will happen to me as well. Life and death, they're all the same. Remember that."

And she let him go, and stood for a moment with her head up, and there were love and devotion in her eyes like a flame.

PART IV

I

ACCORDING to Webster a philanthropist is a person of general benevolence, who loves or wishes well to his fellow-men, who exerts himself in doing good.

Not to Chrissie, who had had the doubtful privilege many times of seeing the real Sherwood through the cracks in his stucco, but certainly to Tony, Lady George, Algernon Lumley, and the generally ungrateful Pollock, whose training in Fleet Street had made him sceptical of men's intentions, the present owner of the "S Y. Isis" was a philanthropist if ever there was one. To him, as to a generous possessor of the magic carpet, this odd collection of frail humanity was indebted for an escape into nature's wide dominions, the astonishment that comes to untravelled people of regulating imagination by reality, the inarticulate rapture of walking through the chambers of a house of dreams.

From the indescribable moment when the yacht had steamed out of Southampton, on a sunny Monday, and poor old Kitty Cornish had made a mess of her face with tears, the party on the "Isis" had been under the influence of general benevolence. Like the children of an inland city who had never been beyond its park, they gazed with delight and excitement at the Isle of Wight, the distant coast of France, and then, as day had followed day with most propitious weather, at Spain and the Rock of Gibraltar. And when they had put into Port Said to refresh the coal bunkers and lay in stores, had spent enchanted

hours on shore making memories for future years. The yacht, immediately explored from end to end, had won their admiration and esteem. No wonder. Built in the Clyde in 1912, for a sea-loving man to live on, her tonnage was sixteen hundred and seven, length all over three hundred and sixteen feet, beam thirty-five feet six, a crew all told of forty, and engines designed for a smooth running eight knots though with the faculty for twelve. The flush deck ran from bow to stern, broken only by the well between the forecastle head and the fore part of the bridge. Running aft from the bridge all the deck-houses, the library, the smoking-room, the dining saloon, and continuing aft, on the port side, the pantry, the enclosed space over the engine room, and on the starboard side a passage leading to the drawing and writing rooms.

The promenade, as smooth as a billiard ball, was nine feet wide and covered with a thick clean awning. About thirty feet from the stern there was a double screen of canvas running thwartships from port to starboard, affording an ample space for the use of the crew. Under the forecastle head, on the main deck, the officers' quarters, very comfortable indeed. Aft the owner's room on the port side the cabins of the captain, the first and second mates, the head steward, the chief engineer, the purser, the officers' mess, the stewards' mess and other rooms. The guests' rooms were starboard—twenty in all, simple and excellent. The lower deck was given up to stores, coal bunkers, the engine room, the stoke-hold, a stack of electric accumulators that kept the lights going when the engines were silent, and a small but capable gym. She carried the regulation number of

life boats as well as two steam launches, one burning coal, the other oil. Not even the most pernickety sailor could carp at her appearance, efficiency, and comfort, and only an unfortunate owner hard hit by peace would have conceived the possibility of her heaving up anchor under any other flag than his own.

With such a ship and with such thankful passengers it was natural that even Sherwood should feel the glow of the philanthropic trend. Born selfish and with a canny nature, given to introspection and the bad habit of feeling his own pulse, it took him some days fully to recover from the amazement of having launched into this reckless expenditure of cash. And having done so, it was again natural—being the man he was—morose, aloof, with a sense of inferiority which had been forced upon him by his snobbish school fellows and fostered by himself—to bask in his sudden revolution, to swell at spending money, and to beam with unaccustomed patronage on his now dependent friends. The yacht was far too large and her upkeep enormous, but he was out to make a gesture, to show himself, as well as everybody concerned, that, in spite of a reputation for meanness, he could fling his money about. He had enough of it, in all conscience. His string of profitable shops was spreading yearly, and he had not spent an unnecessary penny since his father's death. Then, too, deep down behind all else was a subtle wish to impress on Chrissie, fresh from her daily struggle to make both ends meet on Tony's wages, the power that goes with wealth. He did everything for Chrissie according to his lights. And so he had that personal sense of pride in giving pleasure which goes

with Italian priests who act as guides to their Cathedrals, or a mother who initiates the offspring of other women in the facts of life. He was the instrument of discovery, the fairy godfather, the man exerting himself in doing good.

And it was the influence of these new emotions crowding on top of hurried preparation and the necessary arrangements for his quick resolve, that had stopped the growth of the bitter seed which Chrissie had seen the wisdom of planting in his mind. It was very true that her declaration of faith had left him stultified the night of the display of the model, and that he had been on the verge of declaring the whole thing off. But after hours of deep thinking he had succeeded in making himself believe that her statement, sincere at the moment, was too theatrical to be taken seriously. "Don't forget," he had said to himself finally, "that Chrissie has been an actress. She exaggerates. She's sentimental. She has the peculiar stage faculty of making her goose a swan. Once out of the magnetism of Tony's smile and charm—grief, of course, gusts and storms of grief, but then the actor's reaction. And that's where I come in." Before, then, but more than ever now, he refused to accept the fact that Chrissie was really happy in that dog's life, that penury, with the unstable Tony. He had said "I told you so," on reading the paragraphs about the Duchess and the Daimler man in the evening chit-chat, and distorted the gossip about Tony's popularity with the ladies to fit into his fixed ideas. Faithful, loyal, decent, regenerated? Nonsense! He knew Tony through and through. He held more firmly than ever that poor little Chrissie would be glad and willing, in fact deeply thankful, at last

to be the wife of one who could place her in luxury for the first time in her life, and be on his knees at her feet.

In the deep enjoyment of this flight from the dreadfully familiar, this enchanting quest for a spot untouched by progress, Tony and his friends felt that they were giving the slip to Time. That moment in which they spoke to each other seemed already to be far behind them, like a cork thrown overboard.

Day after day the sun was radiant, and night after night the moon grew older and kinder among the multitudinous stars. And while Chrissie watched and guarded, Sherwood ripened for his plan.

II

"'Ere, 'old on there! What's all this?" cried Lady George, glaring at Lumley across the table in the smoking room, into which they had recently retired for a game of cribbage.

Poor devil! He had been held so long responsible for upsets, servant troubles and income tax that he merely shrugged his patient shoulders. Not the Germans but he had brought the War on, and by sneezing one morning twice behind the paper had started, without the smallest doubt, the epidemic of influenza of 1917.

They were passing Sumatra and Java.

It was late afternoon. The clouds of a storm that had burst on the coast of China were scurrying over the yacht in a broken procession, like refugees. Rain fell. There were shudders of distant thunder. Spasms of lightning zig-zagged among the sullen greyness. The sea responded to the angry mood.

Then, a few moments before sundown an explosion of wind swept so violently over the "Isis" that she rolled like a drunken woman.

"Lumley! Don't you 'ear me? What on earth are you doin' to ther bloomin' ship? 'Ere, 'ere! Oh, Saint John the Blacksmith." And away went her chair down the sudden incline.

The gallant Colonel, up at once to go to the rescue of his screaming spouse, lost his legs and fell against the wall. He watched the over-laden chair skid to and fro with its clutching mass of panic, impotent, and if the truth must be told, in an agony of wisely suppressed laughter.

And then the world, in the shape of the "Isis," resumed its normal behaviour, and Lady George, taking a firm hold of the table, gave tongue. "There you are! I've been expectin' something like this to give me a nervous breakdown. You saw the flashes. You 'eard the thunder. You said yerself that all these clouds were let loose by a storm. Why the blazes be a Colonel if you can't guard against a hignerminous thing like that?"

"I'm sorry," said Lumley gravely. "I'll make a point of seeing that it doesn't occur again." The cards were scatter'd all over the floor.

The humour of this statement made no impression upon Lady George. The hard work and long standing hours of her early years had been followed by so much life that she was totally out of humour now. It had been worn away. All that she had in the battered fifties was simply the capacity to see what was ridiculous in other people. Her own absurdities no longer raised her mirth. She was a difficult woman to live with, poor old soul.

"I see no reason why yer shouldn't do somethin' fer yer livin'," she went on, glad to see him put to the pain of picking up the pack. And it *was* pain, with his stiff joints. "Livin' on ther fat of ther land, with other people payin'."

Even that drew no *tu quoque* from the master diplomat. Without this constant nagging he would indeed be lost. It had become as much a part of his routine as the reiterated tapping of the same note to a piano tuner. He never forgot what he would have been without the wife who loved him all the more because her despotism was left unquestioned.

When a woman of middle age possesses neither a dog nor children it is natural that she should order about a husband for the necessary indulgence of an ownership which is essential to her sex. That is the only reason why so many childless women with back-answering husbands fall back on little dogs.

And then Tony came up from the gymnasium all aglow with health. He was almost as sun-burned as an Italian water boy who spends the summer grubbing for stones in the dwindling Arno with which to repair the ravages in the Ponte Vecchio.

Chrissie trotted in at his heels, much disturbed by the uneasy sea.

And Lady George, always stimulated by the presence of younger people so that it was her habit to laugh loudly for no earthly reason, set herself into paroxysms of coughing, and wind up with "Oh dear, oh dear," instantly assumed her party manners and was hail-fellow-well-met.

"Well, you two nice things, and where 'ave *you* come from? The gym by the looks of yer both. What's the idea of all this exercise?"

"The joy of keeping fit," said Tony. "The self-respect that comes from rippling muscles. Torso pride." He chucked his coat into a chair, stood in a white sweater with his legs apart, drew in a long breath through his nostrils, put one hand behind Chrissie's shoulders and the other behind her ankles, raised her high above his head and held her there, wearing the inane smile of a circus strong man—with which he gives a lethargic audience the cue for applause.

As light as a feather, as slim as a girl of fifteen, who stood no higher at any time than the top button of his waistcoat, it was easy enough. But from her horizontal place not far from the ceiling, she beamed with pride in Tony's strength, which was to her only one of the many wonderful things about him. And when he set her down she tittered on her toes and blew kisses to the right and left in the manner of the hard-working little people in pink tights and with pink language whom she had followed so often in the music halls. It was a delightful imitation.

Pollock, who had watched it all from the door, applauded. Not for the first time since he had known Chrissie and caught many glimpses of her charming gifts, it seemed to him to be a crying shame that she should sacrifice herself to Tony merely for the sake of love. To his individualistic way of thinking, love should be regarded, like bridge or reading, as a relaxation, a hobby, and should never be allowed to interfere with the business of a career. If he had been an impresario or a booking agent of the music halls he would have set himself deliberately to break up the existing relations of this girl and that man, procured her a partner and put her back in the public eye.

As it was—oh, well, there was nothing in it for him. Why worry ?

“Nobody never done that ter me,” said Lady George. “I was the Juno type always, I was, as Geordie used ter say, when he cud speak.” And when Lumley took her podgy hand and raised it to his lips in silent agreement with his predecessor’s praise, she wriggled with satisfaction and wrinkled her nose as Chrissie did, a trick that she had caught. All the same she would have given a great deal not to have out-junoed Juno in her sere and yellow. The carrying of a quite superfluous hundred pounds added considerably to the difficulties of life in those hard times.

“It’s distinctly unpleasant on deck,” said Pollock. “What’s the consensus of opinion as to a rubber of bridge before dinner ?”

“I’m on,” said Lady George. “We were only playin’ this game for dotards just to ’ave somethink ter do.”

“And you Colonel ?”

“Oh yes, yes. Certainly.”

“Well then, sit down Tony, and let’s cut for partners.” He, Pollock, sat down, and therefore expected that everyone else would do so too.

“Awful sorry,” said Tony. “I have a long standing engagement with Chrissie to walk a mile before we change for dinner. Where’s Teddy ?”

“With the Captain,” said Pollock. “Come on, my dear chap, for the general good. I feel quite sure that Mrs. Tony will allow you to postpone the walk.” He began to shuffle the cards.

“’Course she’ll,” said Lady George. “She’s always walking. Thin as a knife as it is.”

Lumley gave her a bishop's smile. Almost his only pleasure was a game of bridge. His tobacco relied upon the proceeds.

"But I will, I will," said Chrissie in her suavest manner and most exemplary accent. "I wouldn't spoil a foursome for the world."

Tony was always ready for cards. He had lived by bridge before the War. And he didn't forget that a little ready money would come in useful at the journey's end. But there was his engagement with Chrissie and so he said, with his arm round her shoulder, "You're sure you don't mind?"

She put the tips of her fingers to his lips. Who was a bloomin' gent if he wasn't?

And he kissed them. "But what'll you do while we're playing, duckie?"

"Finish my book in the library. It's awfully good. All about Samoa."

"Right you are, then," he said, and whispered "Good old Chris."

And after watching the grim and deadly start of these four experts—even Lady George played a man's game; it was the only thing except sleep, that kept her tongue still—Chrissie wandered away to indulge in a quiet hour—the rarest treat.

And there in the library was Sherwood.

Hard luck.

III

"Oh, hullo, Teddy," she said.[†]

He had been looking at the weather through a port hole. But before he turned he cleared his face of

its brutal animalism and readopted its now familiar philanthropic smile. He went eagerly but not too eagerly, towards her. It had been his well thought out policy since leaving Southampton to maintain nothing more than a brotherly attitude towards Chrissie, both privately and publicly. In the event of any legal inquiry as to the cause of Tony's death he must, he knew, establish good relations.

"Oh, hullo," he answered. "Come to finish your book? Before you settle down would you like to see exactly where we are and how much further we have to go?"

"Yes, I'd love to," she said. How nice and simple this man could be—had been since they started. She had every reason to believe, and thank God for the fact, that her solemn declaration had had the most healthy effect. From the moment that she had planted what she called her seed, Sherwood had become a very different person. How indescribable the relief!

He opened an atlas on the table. They bent over it together.

"See that Island? That's Java. We're about here, in the Java Sea. The Captain said that but for Borneo as a bunker we should have got a jolly sight more of that storm. Good weather again to-morrow."

"That suits me," said Chrissie. It hardly seemed necessary to move away, now because he just touched her shoulder with his own.

"We shall probably sight New Guinea on that side and Cape York on this in about forty-eight hours. Then the coral sea and a line between the Solomon Isles—these specks—and the New Hebrides. Then the

Fiji Islands, here, and finally Samoa. We shall make for this spot, Apia. Tony's island is one of these. I don't know which."

Chrissie caught her breath. One of those tiny marks in the sea, then, was to become her future home. London seemed to be three hundred years away.

He knew it. He saw her yearning look all the way back across the map. Her place was not on that rotten little island, but in England, in the country, among ancient oaks and yew hedges, herbaceous borders, white fantail pigeons, children. . . .

But he said with a noticeable ring of affection, "I've been thinking a good deal about Tony on this trip, and I've come to the conclusion that his father was quite right to fling this island at him. Any other man would be bored stiff at the mere idea of it, except as a joke or something out of which a few pennies might be squeezed. But Tony takes it seriously, as he has shown us all. It's his vocation to lead men and run a place. He'll become a Wing Commander once again though without the busses that he loved so much. Well, every man to his own taste." He closed the atlas with a beatific smile.

"Yes," said Chrissie. "It was a good day for Tony when Uncle Alan explained his theory to old Lord Stirling."

"And you, Chrissie. Will you like the life in time?"

"I like it now," she said. "I can like anything when I put my mind to it. When, in about a year, you come to look us up, as I hope you will, you'll find me beautifully tattooed, with flowers in my hair. A chocolate coloured Queen with coral ear-rings,

like the women in the book I'm reading." She laughed and to the slip of her fingers did the shimmy, humming a snatch of an imitation Hawaiian hula that had come to London from a Broadway cabaret. She wasn't going to allow anyone, especially Sherwood, to imagine that she was sorry for herself at this transplantation. "Tome, Tome, wela ka hoa," she sang without knowing what on earth it meant, which was, perhaps, as well.

Pollock's thought flashed through Sherwood's mind. Good Heavens, what a waste of talent! Without Tony and with an attractive partner she could have taken her place again at the top of the bill.

"Well," he said admiringly, "that's the proper spirit. And when I do drop in to see you both, as, of course, I shall, you'll find that I've turned the corner into a new way of life myself. Can you guess the first thing that I shall do when I get back to London, Chrissie?"

"No," she said. London, London, Panton Street, the smells, the traffic, the low soft lines. Oh God, how far they were away.

"Find a girl to marry me and settle down."

"Oh, that's good, Teddy," she said. Her seed had taken root.

"Yes, you see, I'm better. This trip has done me good. I'm over that trouble I tried to explain to you. The sea and air have cleared my brain, Chrissie. I have a frightful lot of money, and the business keeps improving. I shall take one of the old houses in London, one of the show places in the country, give them to a girl as much like you as I can discover, collect prints and first editions, buy horses, plant rose trees, and begin again."

He painted a subtly alluring picture, epitomizing all the dreams that had been Chrissie's during her brief prosperity. How often she had discussed them on the Sunday journeys from one town to another in those pre-Tony days. She and Sissie were making all the money in the world.

His cunning was wholly lost on Chrissie. She had forgotten them all. Sissie's death, her quietly made plan to follow, her honeymoon with Tony, the parting before the War, her nursing, love in Panton Street, these vital things had held her. The old dreams, like corks dropped into the sea, were far away behind. The present and the future occupied her thoughts. Tony and Tony's island, gratitude, devotion. And all that she had heard from Sherwood, coming on top of his good behaviour on the yacht, went far to convince her that her time of fear was over. This queer man was ill no longer. He was thinking of a wife. A load was released from her shoulders. Her soul, like the sky, would be clear to-morrow. The storm was passing.

"Now I'll leave you to your book," said Sherwood, congratulating himself on having shaken Chrissie's weak buttress of content. And with a glance at the welcome clouds, and a touch of malicious glee in which he couldn't resist indulging, he whistled the refrain of "To-night's the night" on his way to the smoking room.

IV

But he was very careful at dinner that night to create an atmosphere of the utmost cordiality with

Tony. He intended that the last impression of relations which had been consistently friendly since the yacht was boarded must be the best. He talked about the War, which, as a rule, he never mentioned. He reminded Tony of a dozen comic incidents in which they had been concerned, and made him roar with laughter. He drew him out on some of the raids that they had carried out together, and by making him excited sent his hand to his glass. He led him to recount some of his most perilous moments, adding himself those details of reckless bravery that Tony naturally forgot to mention. He explained to his friends how great his joy had been to serve with such a man, and his admiration of his leadership. He wound up by springing to his feet, raising his glass to Tony and saying, with uncontrollable emotion, "If ever there's another war I'll follow you to Hell."

It was all extremely clever, if a trifle overdone.

As for Tony, who always had been fond of Sherwood and owed him now a greater affection than ever for taking him to the island, he added to the David and Jonathan picture with more than his usual warmth. The end of it was that Lady George and Lamley altogether forgot Sherwood's antagonism that night at Hill Street, and Pollock, who disbelieved in friendship, had evidences of this one which he certainly could describe. Chrissie already had been flung off her guard, and when Teddy repeated his master-stroke at the dinner table by drinking a toast to "the future Mrs. Sherwood" she not only felt that the sword of Damocles had been sheathed and put away, but would have to say in the event of any inquiry that Sherwood had lived down his old jealousy.

When the ladies rose and went to the drawing room, the Captain, especially invited by Sherwood in order that he might see the jovial condition of Tony, joined the men in the dining room for a drink and a cigar. Whereupon a bottle of fine old brandy liqueur went freely round the table, and with its circulation Tony's laugh became louder and more frequent. He was as happy as a sand boy, and under the excitement of the wine, the adventure, and Sherwood's good feeling, was on the top of his form.

Sherwood had prepared this plan of campaign with the precision of a strategist. The last necessary step was to get Tony on his own volition out alone on deck. But how? There was the question.

It was answered almost immediately by Tony himself in the most satisfactory manner.

"Ten o'clock," said Pollock, thoroughly seasoned. "Who says bridge?"

Lumley rose, not quite so gracefully as usual. The abominable need of looking at every post-war penny had put him reluctantly on the water wagon for nearly a year. "Bridge" he said with a funny laconicism.

"I'm on," said Tony. "Anything that's going." And he got up and laughed at his unsteady knees.

"All right," said Sherwood. "That suits me."

"Well then, good night gentlemen," said the Captain. "Nice weather again to-morrow according to the glass."

Tony slapped him on the back. "Good for you, old sea gull. I'm a salamander. Can't have too much sun. Oh, we're bound for Mother Cary where she feeds her chicks at sea."

The Captain's blue eyes filled with friendliness.

His boy had been in the R.A.F., done well, and come out alive. He had often spoken in a tone of hero worship of Stirling Fortescue. Well, he could imagine that a year or two in the South Seas would make a pleasant change after a long spell of London and its traffic. Fishing, manana, no Daimler to drive. But how about the little lady? Queer place for a white woman, those islands. Now for a game of poker in the officers' mess.

"Pollock," said Tony, "I think it might be a good idea if we took a turn before sitting down. A rush of air through the head, eh?"

"I object to draughts," said Pollock.

"You, Colonel?"

"No thanks, dear boy," said Lumley. "I love this beautiful ripeness. I shall nurse it."

"Well then, give me ten minutes," said Tony. "Twice round at about four miles an hour and I shall be able to spot the difference between hearts and diamonds. Will you join me, Teddy? Come on. Do you good, young fella."

Wonderful. Exactly right. Now for an alibi. "Can't, old boy," said Sherwood. "Going along to my room to O.K. a chit from the purser. I'll be in the smoking room as soon as you are." He went out quickly to hide an involuntary expression of joy. Say your prayers you swine who played the thief with Chrissie. The moment has come at last!

Whereupon, white to the lips, his teeth showing like an angry dog's, his hands ready to grasp, his deep chest heaving, he stood in the shadow on the starboard side, exalting. . . . God, how long and how patiently he had waited for this. July, 1914. September, 1919. Five years of love waste, of blind

and frightful jealousy, inarticulate fury, passions of impotent violence, ravaging dreams, illness. . . .

The deed committed as much for Chrissie's sake in the long run as for his own, he told himself with absolute conviction, a quick dash to his room, then the quiet entrance into the smoking room with the purser's chit in his hand, and a commonplace remark or two to start a general conversation before Tony's absence was noted. The impatient Pollock, the call, the search. "My God, he must have sat on the rail for a moment and fallen overboard," consternation. The yacht stopped, a boat put out, Mafische, the end.

The swinging stride, nearer, nearer. The too familiar voice raised in a swan song—"Mother Carey's chickens where she feeds her chicks at sea."

The pounce, the clutch, the heave against the rail--and a loud, resounding laugh.

"Why hullo, Teddy, where are your sea legs to-night? Hit the bottle once too often, eh?"

Other steps. The Captain's. "Slight swell on and the decks are wet. Easy to skid," he said. He stopped for a few more pleasant words. "It's as black as pitch out here."

"Yes, I skidded," said Sherwood, welcoming the cue. "Sorry, Tony, I'm afraid I grabbed you."

"That's all right, old son. Good thing that I was here to break your fall. Better go in or Pollock will be impatient. Good-night, Cap."

"Good-night, sir. Hold good hands."

Some men had as many lives as a cat and the luck of the devil!

And when the two friends entered the smoking room, Tony's arm was round Teddy Sherwood's shoulders. David and Jonathan.

"It'll be as black as pitch again," said Sherwood to himself.

V

Having been more or less silent for about two hours, Lady George drew away from the bridge table with a final whiskey and soda and began to talk. Even Algernon Lumley, who knew his wife's methods as well as a trainer knows the idiosyncrasies of a performing seal, was unable quite to guess how great an effort it had been for her to bottle up her effervescence.

"I like this room," she said, apropos of nothing. "Some'ow it takes me back to them old days when I queened it in the Great Western bar at Reading. Of course, this place is smarter and more classy with the photos of Lord William Sidecup's pals all over the walls—and by gum, he seems to 'ave known every worth-while Johnny of 'is time. It's the smell, I suppose. Baccy and corks and the subtle whiff of engine oil. If anybody banged a few doors, blew a whistle and made a noise like a train, I'm jolly sure I should shed a hairpin and start moppin' the nearest table with a wash rag." Her reminiscent laugh had in it the suggestion of a tear.

Pollock took a backward leap too. The mood was catching, and he had arrived at the age when the past begins to assume a greater importance than the future. "It was at Reading on one of those glorious whiskey crawls that I first met you, Kitty. What a handsome girl you were, my dear. An asset to the line. No wonder the G.W.R. paid good dividends

in those never to be repeated times. I have only to shut my eyes for a moment to see George Cornish weeping alcohol and clinging to the bar as it went round and round the room. Dear old Cornish! How magnificently he earned the right to call himself the "last of the Brandies."

"You're right," said Lady George sadly. "The boys of to-day can't hold a candle to the boys of yester year."

"Or a bottle," said Pollock, in the same spirit of regret.

Algernon Lumley began to put away the cards in their respective boxes. He was a neat person. And, naturally enough, he took extreme pleasure in hearing the praises of his predecessor. He owed him a deep debt of gratitude for having married Kitty, died so conveniently, and left her with an income upon which he had long enjoyed the ability to live as a gentleman of independent means.

Chrissie had fallen asleep in a huge armchair in which she looked younger and smaller than ever, and Tony had gone to sit on one of its arms with a proud proprietary smile. "The one and only Chrissie" was written all over her boyish face.

Still cursing himself for a blundering fool, Sherwood continued to act the part of Charles, his friend, by beaming at them both. It required a frightful effort.

A steward who had done his hair with the regulation donkey driver's twist of the cavalry trooper moved quietly in and out.

The night had become thick and drowsy, though with no suggestion of fog. The wind had been light and fluky since sundown, and now was even less perceptible than the breathing of a child. A flat sea

gave way sullenly to the passage of the yacht. That almost imperceptible land smell which immediately catches the sensitive nose of a sailor lay on the air.

It was midnight, but no one appeared to be anxious for bed.

Lady George went off on one of her characteristic tangents. "Oh, I say, Tony," she said, slewing round in her heavily laden chair. "Was I right in tellin' Pollock that one of ther things you did before the War was ter make a book?"

"Not altogether," replied Tony quietly, anxious not to disturb the sleeping girl. "When I was broke to the wide after having been hoofed out of Oxford, I allowed my name to be used by three bookies whose own names were not exactly honoured in the land just then. They paid me a tenner a week to be seen in the office for an hour or two a day, and as you can well imagine it was a handy sum to make. They did awfully well during the flat season, but when it came to the sticks they made bets themselves and busted. Then gaded one of the velvet patches in an otherwise scrubby career."

"You young devil!" said Lady George with the warmest admiration. "If you 'adn't made yourself so doocid popular those days you'd 'ave starved, that you would. Yer never did a stroke of work, come, did yer, now?"

Tony gave a rather wry smile. "Didn't I? I don't mind telling you, dear old thing, that I worked a jolly sight harder in order not to work than any man who worked."

"Yes, all of you did," said Pollock, putting Tony's phrase in his waistcoat pocket to spring as his own impromptu. "But don't forget that you were helped

very greatly by being your father's son. The Honourable Anthony meant something before Lloyd George became Prime Minister and threw titles to his friends with all the cheap enjoyment of the tourist who throws bird seed to Italian pigeons. Now, with Smith an Earl, Brown a Viscount, and Jones a Peer, and all the newspaper owners running in and out of the House of Lords under comic disguises it's a different story. Semi-society has dropped the parasitical younger son, is fed up with titles, and is giving poets and portrait painters the run of their teeth. You were, as you saw so plainly, between the Daimler and the South Sea Island. I think that you were very wise to choose the latter, Tony. You'll become a self-supporting person for the first time in your life."

"Yes, but will he?" asked Lady George. "How do yer make that out?"

"The common or garden cocoanut," replied Pollock airily, "which he will be able to shake from its prolific tree with a minimum of effort."

"What if he will? I don't see 'ow that's going to be the panorama of all 'is troubles."

"Panacea," corrected Pollock, with the irritating superiority of the schoolmaster. "Let me point out to you, dearest Kitty, that quite apart from its commercial value which is very great, because copra is elaborated into a large variety of products ranging from railway grease to toilet soap, while the outer husk of the thing we chuck balls at in the village circus, becomes very durable floor matting in the proper hands—the good old cocoanut provides food, drink, and shelter, baskets, bags and trays, drag nets, drinking cups, scoops, catch-alls and bailers. Then, too, the oil of this versatile vegetable not only makes

a hair tonic guaranteed to cover the baldest pate with fluff, but fattens pigs, the delights of which, when roasted on hot stones and served with *miti-hari* sauce, have called forth many Stevensonian rhapsodies. Then again, the trunk of any one of Tony's trees, which tapped at its heart, yields a delectable fluid which makes an excellent substitute for yeast, while chunks cut from the same tender portion form the base of a salad which is far better than anything to be had at Claridge's or the Savoy. If you don't believe me, ask Mrs. Tony, who has been studying how to live like a fighting cock on nothing but a cocoanut from the book I'm quoting from."

"Then why the devil live in Knightsbridge with the lights turned down and in mortal terror of the tax collector," asked Lady George, profoundly surprised and moved.

"If it comes to that," said Pollock, "why be the slaves of so-called civilization with all its penalties at all, when with three cocoanut trees and a hut, a loin cloth and a ukalali one can give a miss in baulk to newspapers, telephones, motor traffic, politicians and policemen, theatres, concerts and Freudian novels, and go to one's grave with the grace, freedom and good digestion of a South Sea Islander?"

"Yes, but if a loin cloth's an *ipse dixit*," said Lady George with a shudder, "I fear that lets me out."

The united male laugh that echoed from wall to wall at the poor fat lady's objection brought Chrissie back from Panton Street.

"What's the joke?" she asked, her blue eyes filled with sleep. •

Tony bent down and kissed her. "It wasn't a joke," he said.

And everyone laughed again, except Lumley upon whom Lady George turned a very wifely eye.

Whereupon Sherwood began to paint a picture of a new Elysium with a brush in which there was a subtle mixture of poisonous ridicule. "I begin to see that Paradise Island may be made to run true to its name," he said. "Having built a Buckingham Palace consisting of two large rooms near enough to the surf to make a bathroom superfluous, Tony can start a colony for ultra-civilized people who pine to go back to nature without a censorship. With Lady George wearing a costume of the most fashionable tattoos, living rent and light free with the Colonel on the south-east corner, and Mortimer Pollock becoming more and more simple on a quiet spot near by, what's to prevent Tony from blossoming into a benefactor by throwing the place open to a select number of similar fed-ups who play a decent game of bridge? He and I and you can make a list at any minute of the most eligible candidates of also-rans who will immediately shed all semblance of civilization on Pollock's delightful lines, and the 'Isis' can be devoted to the good work of bringing them over from time to time. And so that there shan't be any over-crowding and the repetition of the housing problem as we know it in poor old effete London, other islands can be pinched from their present owners in little Coral wars which will keep Tony's hand in. By these means, gradually, the whole of the old aristocracy can be brought over to live and die gracefully on and under the magic cocoanut tree. There are only about two hundred of them left over from the war in any case, and by intermarriage with the native a new splendid race will spring up, among

whom Tony will be King with Lords and Ladies of the Bedchamber who will inherit the knowledge of their intimate and diplomatic jobs from the original settlers whose names are at present to be read from left to right in every number of the *Tattler*, poor but proud. Paradise and its affiliated islands would thus become the happy hunting ground of aristocratic sportsmen without the necessity of doing anything but fish and shoot, play cards and gamble with coral, as they did in the glorious days of Charles I before Cromwell messed things up."

He rose and with respectful gravity and a nasty smile bowed deeply to Tony. "I have the honour respectfully to submit to your majesty that rough outline of a scheme." And added inwardly, "which you'll never have the chance to do more than consider, because next time I pounce I'll heave."

"Thanks most awfully," said Tony democratically with a royal smile. "I'll make a note of it." And he shot a wink at Chrissie as who should say "he's trying to pull my leg."

Lady George finished her drink and struggled to her feet. She was bored, and if the truth must be told, annoyed. It seemed to her that Sherwood, presuming on the fact that he was host, had talked too much. "Are yer goin' ter sit 'ere all night, Lumley, or what's the bally notion? Can't yer look at the time, pray?"

"I beg your pardon," said the patient punch-ball, gathering up his wife's inevitable litter.

"Yes," said Pollock "bed's a good place, I think. Sherwood, I never gave you credit for a satirical turn of thought. Something of a dark horse, my boy." He would have added "for a grocer," being rude, but

that he remembered, just in time, the fact that he was Sherwood's guest. He mixed a last whiskey and soda to carry to his room. So long as one hand was in reach of civilization he would stick to old habits. With his fastidious nose and a mind as eager for constant stimulants as was his soft body, he was the last man in the world to become a native of any other island than the one upon which he had been born. And on that he could only be happy on a spot that was well within the four mile radius of Piccadilly Circus. No comfort for him unless his loin cloth were made in Sackville Street.

Not in the perfunctory manner of a Mediterranean but with the instinctive deference to elderly womanhood which was one of his habits, Tony touched Lady George's hand with his lips. "Good 'night," he said affectionately. "Sleep well."

And Lady George paused, heavily, returned his smile with equal affection, drew him close and made him a handsome present of a resounding kiss. "There," she said, "I felt like that, my dear."

"Thanks most awfully," said Tony.

"Yer needn't be jealous of me, Chrissie. I knew this boy long before you did, fed him, gave him many a shake-down and loved him like a mother," which was a poetical version of the truth. "And if it hadn't been for the invitation that brought him to my box at the Covent Garden Ball, you would never have met him, darlin'. Isn't that so?"

Chrissie shook her head.

"What d'yer mean? It's true."

"No," said Chrissie. "It was meant. I should have met him somewhere else."

Meant? Lady George was tired or she would have

argued. She shrugged her shoulders, put it down to psychic stuff and waddled off with Lumley.

But just as it had done before in Mount Street all those years before, the word got on Sherwood's nerves. With a crash he came out of his elaborate stucco, and before he could regain self-mastery brought down into utter chaos all his cunning work.

"My God, my God," he cried, the real Sherwood again. "Where did you get that damn fool word? 'Meant!' What is it? What's it stand for? If anything at all is meant in this ghastly series of mistakes it wasn't that you should have been pinched by Tony but have stuck to me. I was yours then, body and soul, just as I am now, and I'd earned the right to be given a decent sporting chance if you'd known the rules of the game. Damn everything, will nothing shake you out of this silly mystic blither? Are you going to cling to it all your life like a religious fanatic to a dogma?"

He yelled these things at the top of his voice, his face white but for the red patch of his wound.

"Oh dear, oh dear," said Chrissie, who saw with the most dreadful disappointment that the sword had not been sheathed.

Tony was amazed. Long ago he had convinced himself that all this belonged to a forgotten chapter. "My dear old Teddy," he said, finding his voice, "if you must dig up these old potatoes fling the things at me."

"Old potatoes?" They were most unfortunate words. "Oh, so that's what you call my love and hunger for the girl you sneaked from me! By God, that does it. I just wanted some such thing as that to put you in your place." He leaped from the floor and went for Tony like a starving wolf.

They fell together—David and Jonathan ; rolled together, clasped in an embrace ; first one on top, then the other, both exerting every effort of muscular strength for supremacy : while to Chrissie, distraught and terror-stricken, Tony, gasping for breath, called out “ Stand . . . clear, dear . . . old . . . thing. Fetch . . . nobody. Do . . . nothing. This is a . . . private . . . row. It's going to be . . . quite easy.” It was obvious that he was anxious to prevent the crew from knowing anything of the owner's madness. (Didn't I say he was a bloomin' gent !)

Sherwood wrestled with all the lithe power of a man rejoicing in the realization of a fact so often rehearsed in thought. To him this was a fight to a finish, a fight legitimately brought on by an unforgivable instigation. Manslaughter ? Well, by God, there was a difference between that and murder. Once let him bounce the wind out of this damned self-satisfied thief and dig his hands into that laughter-making throat . . .

And so it was very far from easy, hard and fit as Tony was. He had not expected this sudden onslaught. He had been completely off his guard. The resuscitation of the old grievance was in itself a blow in the mouth. Good Heavens, think of those days and nights of the closest intimacy and mutual reliance during the War. Surely to God they must have wiped out the sting of defeat in the case of Chrissie ? She had never been under any obligation to Sherwood. She had been as free as air to choose a man to love. There was no earthly reason, of course, why this extraordinary Teddy shouldn't continue to adore Chrissie. There was nothing queer about that. But damn it, why didn't the funny old thing get it

into his head that she belonged to someone else who also adored her, that she was, oddly enough, happy, ecstatically happy, and, moreover, contented, difficult as some people seemed to find it to believe. All the same it was frightfully upsetting to have to put up the devil's own fight against a man one liked so tremendously, who had been such a real good sort, and to whom one owed a debt of gratitude that could never be repaid.

"Now then . . . old . . . son," he gasped, "that's quite . . . enough. Chuck . . . it."

Sherwood gave a sort of scream and doubled his efforts.

Whereupon, for every reason in the world, Tony decided to bring this silly business to an end. It was frightening Chrissie, it might disturb the peace of the ship, and it would eventually ruin a suit of clothes that had been marked out for many Sundays on the islands.

"All right," he said, and, with his dander up, went to it. He knew this game. Hours of his old-time leisure every day had been spent in gymnasiums. He had boxed and wrestled with a wide selection of the men who did these things.

Crash . . . One or two more like that. Want some more? Well then, crash again. Still not satisfied? What's the matter with the man? Another crash. Talk about splitting cocoanuts. Saw stars that time, what? Why, good Lord, he loves it. All right, then. Crash. How's that?

"You silly ass," said Tony, staggering to his feet, dishevelled and wet to the skin. "What . . . what on earth's . . . the idea?"

And there lay Sherwood, battered, stertorous, his head as big as a pumpkin, his heart in his throat.

But was he done? Not he. First one hand on the floor, then the other, then a knee, then up, swaying, uncertain of his feet, a supreme effort, a mighty lunge at Tony's body, met by a knockout blow from an expert left. That was all.

And when he stood over the insensible body of the man for whom he had so great an affection Tony's eyes were full of tears. "You confounded idiot," he said, "why do you make me do these rotten things?"

VI

It was something after one o'clock when Tony left Teddy Sherwood's room with Chrissie.

His tie was cock-eyed, his clothes unrecognizable, his face grave. "I must have a pipe before I turn in," he said, "and get some air. Get to bed, darling, I won't be long. You must be very tired."

"I am," said Chrissie, "but I'm going with you."

He touched her cheek with a tender finger. "Good old Chris. You always do that."

They went out and stood by the starboard rail, amidships, hand in hand in the dark.

Tony had carried Sherwood to bed. As once before he had worked over his friend and brought him back to consciousness. This time Sherwood had said nothing, but had given way to a violent fit of weeping, which was worse. Finally he had asked to be left alone, had thanked them and said, "I'm sorry. That's the way it takes me. It's a hopeless case. I'm sorry." They had turned out his light, said nothing and gone away. There was nothing to be said.

It was a strangely thoughtful Tony who slowly

loaded his pipe. It was his habit to do things on the spur of the moment, to think no further ahead than he could see; if possible not to think at all. He had no ideas about it, no explanations, no excuses. He had never given it a name as was the fashion, called himself a fatalist, a presentist, or any new fangled thing. He neither knew nor cared to know the meaning of these terms. When people accused him of an inability to think, he simply said, with the most astounding honesty and utter freedom from cant, "Well, that's me," and let it go, with a laugh. The fact was, and he knew it without the intricate dissection of psycho-analysis which merely provides new names for old weaknesses, that he had been born without a thinking box, as some unfortunate men are born without an ear for music, or a sense of colour. Nature, extremely kind at times, had done very well by him in this respect. Given the gift of thought which would have brought to-morrow within his focus, he would have been unable to retain the blazing optimism which carried him through to-day, or to have made so fine a fighting man. During the War the thinkers were the people who had had shell shock or were shot up against a wall for cowardice and desertion. The only people who could afford to think wore brass hats and stuck pins in maps and talked about strategy far behind the lines. The War would have been over several years sooner, perhaps, if most of them had been sent up nearer to the front.

"To me," said Tony, after a brief and futile effort, "the thing that comes out of this is that Teddy is a very faithful chap. I believe he loves you as much as I do, Chris, and he couldn't do more than that." He put his arm round her and drew her close.

"Um," said Chrissie, with her head against his shoulder, "but in a very different way. What are we going to do, Tony? What *are* we going to do?"

"You mean he'll attack again and go on attacking until he gets you for himself?"

"Yes," she said. "He's ill. He said so. He's worse than he thinks he is. Long ago, if you remember, he had mad moments. Now he's altogether mad. This yacht is all a part of it. His behaviour since we started. His way of throwing up smoke screens. His affection to-night."

"Affection to-night . . . My God!" There came into his mind the after-dinner episode.

"What? Why did you say that?" She peered into his face.

"When we left the dining room to play bridge and I was taking a couple of turns in the air, he pounced and clutched me, said he skidded on the wet deck when the Captain joined us . . ."

"Oh dear, oh dear," said Chrissie and drew in her breath between her teeth. Then, suddenly, with a blaze of the maternal instinct, she flung her arms about his neck. "Oh, Tony, Tony, what are we going to do? He'll have you. He's after you. He brought you to sea for this."

And as he kissed her and held her tight a curious icy ripple went up and down his spine. But he laughed and said "We're like two children in the woods," trying to make light of the business.

"I've always thought that," she said.

"You have no one. I have no one. And now we're utterly lost. But, thank God, we have each other. And we must keep together, Tony. Let nothing happen to break us apart. Until we get to

the island, if ever we do, you must be most frightfully careful, you must watch everything, suspect everything, always keep with somebody. Swear."

"I swear, darling," he said. "It's all quite amazing. And it hits me devilish hard to know that all our years together in the War left Teddy with the fixed idea that I should be a rotter to you. Well, now we know what it really means when a man goes mad about a girl. It's . . . what's the word . . . disgusting?"

"Yes. That's how it has always seemed to me."

It was still thick and warm, with not enough wind to stir an indolent feather. Everywhere sea, that huge sheet of sea, oily smooth at that moment, but treacherous and temperamental. Layers of aimless clouds hung low hiding moon and stars. The steady beat of the exemplary engines alone broke the hollow silence.

"Poor old Teddy," said Tony presently. "He never had a chance . . . Well, I dunno. It's most uncomfortable and eerie. I don't mind saying that I shall be jolly glad to put my feet on Apia. What made you say 'If ever we do?'"

"He may turn back," she said, hoping that he would.

"No, he can't do that. The Captain must clear his papers at Apia."

"He may set fire to the yacht."

"He may . . . but he won't. He doesn't want to get rid of anybody but me."

Chrissie heaved a sigh that ended in a sob. If only . . . if only Tony had not been interfered with by his brother, and the letter and the chart had never come to his hand!

Panton Street seemed to be a very good place to

Tony too, at that moment, because the shock that he had received that night had done more to reduce his Heaven-sent resilience than anything during the whole course of his ups and downs. He had held Teddy in great affection and respect. He had looked upon him as his closest pal. He had known him in spite of his inarticulation and strange moods for a man of rare courage who had never failed, during the War, to rise to the occasion. To discover now, suddenly, that he was hated by Sherwood, that all his kindness had been a screen behind which he had hidden a prolific growth of vengeance, hurt him more than he had words to say—and he was not usually stumped for words. They had been, indeed, like his winning smile, a well-used asset. To have had it proved to him also by these two murderous attacks, that Teddy had failed to believe in his regeneration that had been brought about by a deep resolve to play the game by Chrissie, took the linch-pin out of his self-respect. It made him ask himself whether, after all his efforts, he was worthy of Chrissie's love, loyalty, and devotion. Wasn't he, after all was said and done, a mere Daimler man, an uneducated creature, glib of tongue, with nothing but the problematical deeds of a comic island to bless himself with? Oh God, who looked down upon this messy world, how difficult it was to get through, to find a solid place to stand on, the niche for which one had been intended! For the first time since he had buckled himself so confidently to Chrissie, it made him ask her humbly and with dejection for the truth of things.

He said "Chris, have I let you down, old girl?"

She shook her head and tightened her arms about his neck.

"Be honest with me to-night."

"Have you ever found me anything but honest?"

"Never. It's your name. It's you. But tell me this. You know what I was when you took me. Have I ever been less than that, worse than that, more hopelessly absurd and foolish? Have I ever hurt you or disappointed you? Have you any grievances?"

She kissed him on the lips, and then said "Yes, I have."

"What are they? I'll remove them if I can."

And she kissed him again. "You can only do that by saying nothing more," she said with a sort of anger. "Every question you've asked builds up a grievance. I love you, I love you. You're Tony. You've given me the only real happiness I've ever, ever known. I wouldn't have you different by the shade of an inch, I wouldn't, so help me God."

Tony was everlastingly grateful for those good words.

And in spite of anxiety, bewilderment and horror, being blessed with youth, they presently slept like the two children in the woods.

VII

The next morning, as though nothing had happened, Sherwood strolled into breakfast.

Being more than ten minutes late, all the others were seated. Their appetites were keen under those healthy conditions, and being English, breakfast was a favourite meal. Then, too, the sun was shining again in a cloudless sky, and the wind, on the port

beam, was blowing so smoothly that the yacht, undisturbed by the lift of waves, held to an even keel. Of pitch, roll or shiver there was none, much to Lady George's thankfulness, and but for the motion of the steady, ding-dong, forward glide, and the engine's inevitable vibration, they might have been anchored in a tideless river. Trouble, like yesterday's bad weather, seemed to be far behind.

"Morning everybody," said Sherwood, with a general smile.

On his way to the head of the table, he laid his hand on Tony's shoulder with so kind a touch and gave Chrissie a look of pride so like that of a brother that he raised strange doubts in the minds of them both. Was this quiet genial person the wild devil of last night, the screaming demented creature who had fought with everything but teeth? Or had they been together through a ghastly delusion?

Lady George waved her hand but kept her eyes on her eggs and bacon. Mortimer Pollock was indulging in the delicate operation of pouring cream upon his porridge. He gave back a cheery good-morning without looking up. Lumley's eyes were by no means as good as they used to be, and therefore, although he gave Sherwood a bland smile in his most courteous manner, he failed to see the swelling on the side of his jaw. But Tony saw it and so did Chrissie, and were thus reassured as to their own, although not as to Sherwood's, sanity in spite of his astonishing calm. They had both expected that he would have kept to his cabin at least for a day. What on earth was the next move in the disturbing game?

"Well," said Lady George, talking with her mouth full, "I had a few words with the Captain just now

and he said that as soon as we make the Coral Sea, as he put it, late this afternoon, we're pretty well on the last lap. What price that ? ”

“ Perfectly true,” said Pollock, in the know-all manner of a dramatic critic. “ Solomon Islands on the one hand, New Hebrides on the other, F'iji, Samoa. A matter of three or four days, I take it, if the weather remains like this.”

Tony darted a look of huge relief at Chrissie which she signalled back with interest. Apia and the island—they now assumed almost the desirability of Pantou Street to her.

“ Something like that,” she said casually. “ I've heard a good deal about hurricanes in these waters, which are most dangerous, but I don't suppose they will knock much off our knottage, having steam.”

“ Don't let's allude to roughness in the middle of a good breakfast,” said Lady George. “ It isn't done in the best circles.”

Sherwood's laugh was that of a man with nothing on his mind.

Nevertheless by talking hard to Tony at the moment when Lady George, Lumley and Pollock moved away from the table—Chrissie never budged—he proved that there was something on it by telling the steward to come back in ten minutes, and disclosed it when they had the room to themselves.

“ I want to say this simply and frankly,” he said, “ and there the thing will end. It was not altogether my fault that I went off my nut last night. That word ‘ meant,’ and I don't think I need explain why, acts on me like a trigger on a loaded cartridge. ‘ Old potatoes ’ was even worse. I saw red, and you know what happens when I do that. Think of York Street.

The other thing, Tony, was a genuine skid. You may take that as the absolute truth. All this doesn't excuse what happened. .. It's inexcusable. I can only say again that I'm sorry, most awfully sorry, and ask you to forgive me. I have moments of madness, as Chrissie knows, or I might have had a chance. That was one of them. I can't help it. You must be careful and bear with me. Apart from that I'm as right as rain. You saw that up to last night. I swear that you shall see it for the rest of the trip. Will you take my word for it ? "

" Yes," said Chrissie, meaning No.

" Yes," said Tony, with enormous gladness, always ready to believe what he was told. " By jove, yes, Teddy, old man." And he grasped the hand of friendship that was held out to him with great emotion.

" That's damned good of you," said Sherwood, equally moved. " Now we can enjoy ourselves again." It was a wonderful piece of acting.

When they went out, Sherwood had one hand through Chrissie's arm and the other through Tony's, and there wasn't a cloud to be seen.

That evening, however, at sunset, Lady George was made uneasy by the sinister look of the sky. The sun, blazing like a furnace, went down behind a bank of coal-black clouds, and these, sullen and heavy, were torn suddenly into great fleeing strips by the force of a devastating wind. Darkness fell upon the Pacific like a funeral pall, and the staggering blows of a gale with its angry squalls of rain stampeded the sea into an endless series of charging bulls.

For forty-eight hours, during which the " Isis " leaped like a mountain goat from heights to hollows, shaking

the spume from her eyes and the souse of waters from her deck, while the wind shrieked through her rigging like a million derisive witches, Sherwood's ideas of enjoyment went overboard like everything that was not securely clamped down. Poor old Lady George died a hundred deaths and was altogether too tragically far gone to lay the blame on Lumley, who, a mere fair weather sailor, became a total wreck. Pollock, metaphorically handing in his checks, retired at once to his cabin, and there, with a bottle of brandy, cursed the yacht, criticized the sea with more bitter sarcasm than even he had ever been permitted to use about a play, and gave himself up to many humiliating outbursts of physical upheaval. Sherwood also disappeared, and after putting up a dogged fight of mind over matter Chrissie succumbed. Tony was the only one to keep his feet, his appetite and his optimism. Few things had ever made him so happy and relieved as Sherwood's return to grace, and the island was almost in sight. Exhilarated but not giddy, with an implacable faith in the seaworthiness of the gálian "Isis" and her crew, he watched the storm from the snug smoking room, waited on Chrissie with increasing tenderness, slept with the triumph of a cherub, and thanked his stars for an excellent liver. Everything considered, the yacht made a fairly good run.

At last, to a rising barometer, the hurricane spent itself, and the wind, after chopping round towards the east, gradually fell away. The sea, jade green and streaked with foam, settled, after an aftermath of sobs, into a better temper. The sky became clear once more. One by one the shaken guests came blinking from their cabins like rabbits when the guns

had been withdrawn. They all agreed with Lady George's summing up of that unpleasant interruption, which was quite unprintable.

Living up to his promise to behave on the yacht, Sherwood was affability itself, being perfectly satisfied that he would eventually receive an inspiration which would enable him to set Chrissie free of Tony after a week or two on shore.

In due course, to Tony's intense excitement and delight, a smudge rose up on the horizon which was to become Apia, the jumping-off place for Paradise, the island of desire.

VIII

"The Bay of Apia," said Pollock, leaning on the rail, surrounded by an attentive audience, "is a typical South Pacific harbour, as we shall see this afternoon. With a reef which cuts it off from the sea it is an open roadstead on the leeward side of the island." He spoke with all the assurance of its oldest inhabitant, being a newspaper man and having got his facts from the library of the yacht. "It is by no means an ideal harbour because the reef affords no protection against the sort of hurricane that we have just endured. The bottom of the bay is, therefore — and there is no reason why I should withhold this from you—as thickly littered with trading schooner wreckage as with pink coral."

"You're an angel of 'ope, I don't think," said Lady George. "Well, if it comes to a choice between London and another storm give me Hill Street and the tax collector every blessed time."

"I quite agree," said Lumley, speaking for himself for once.

Hearing nothing of these remarks Tony, with his arm through Chrissie's, had his eyes fixed wistfully on the gradually enlarging smudge.

"The town of Apia," continued Pollock, quoting freely "is picturesque and fairly lively, a mixture, as all such places are in these waters, of the new and old. Its traditions, like its giant trees, have withstood both the spoiling hands of traders and the side-spring boots and devastating irritants of persistent missionaries. But the business section of the town can be recognized at once by the galvanized iron stores that hurt the artistic eye and by innumerable copra warehouses and several stubby piers, which are useful but hideous, as nearly everything useful is. The houses of the natives, charming if distinctly unhygienic, are scattered about among the cocoa trees on the flat, while those of the Europeans, estate-agently called residences, make bright blocks of white on the lower slopes of the mountain. The spacious Government House, cool and dignified, stands aloof, of course, from the common herd in the midst of well-kept gardens. Higher up, 'through rifts of encompassing verdure,' glimpses may be had of the broad porticos of the old home of the much-loved *Tusitala*, under which musical and probably appropriate Samoan name the gentle Robert Louis Stevenson was known to his adopted people."

"The only Stevenson that meant anything ter me," said Lady George, "was Frank—him as sang the hero's songs at Daly's and twiddled his feet about a little when the leading lady danced. Took on a very much smaller 'at when he missed his at Gallipoli, I tell yer."

"Be that as it may," remarked Pollock, somewhat pained, "your glass will presently reveal to you the scars of a vertical path that leads to the cloud-wreathed summit of the mountain that towers above Varlima. Up there, though you will never see it, is the shrine of the Master, the last resting-place of a sweet and noble pilgrim who set up many milestones of everlasting beauty on his road to death."

Vitally interested in what was the mother of the smaller islands that she had gazed at on the map, one of which must be their future home, Chrissie edged Tony out of range of Pollock's tourist conductor's voice. If instead of Apia in this strange dramatic sea they had been drawing nearer and nearer to the Isle of Wight, and so back once more to Southampton, with her beloved London a mere train journey away, Chrissie would not have been able to see through a mist of joyful tears. London, Panton Street again, the Daimler, the old familiar sounds. Ah, how good they had been and how strongly they now tugged at her heartstrings. "But I must cut these strings," she said to herself, with her cheek against Tony's shoulder, "and forget all that, while I give thanks to God. Here, there, anywhere, what's it matter so that I'm with Tony? Home is where Tony is. Two rooms, a smart apartment, a native hut out under the sky, it's all the same if Tony's there, because he loves me and I'm his."

And something of this daily hymn of hers must have touched a responsive chord in Tony's spirit, because he put his arm round Chrissie's shoulder as he stared at the mark ahead.

And after a while he translated himself into words. "Amazing," he said. "Amazing. All the way

back through the years. Is it true? Only a few weeks ago Apia and the old man's island were as completely out of reach as the moon and stars."

Sherwood came up, wearing a practical expression. "I've just been talking to the Captain," he said. "He knows Apia very well—so well that he's not going to send a wireless asking for a pilot. He advises that we sleep aboard because he thinks very small beer of the bedrooms at the so-called hotel. What ideas have you got on the matter, Tony?"

"Well, I think the Captain's right so far as you're concerned, old boy, you and the others. But if it's all the same to you, Chrissie and I will land and take a room. To set things going at once I shall have to see the Consul, find the man my father placed in charge of the island, if he's still alive, and get into my job as soon as I can. There's lots to be done and I'm as keen as mustard to get at it."

"Yes, of course," said Sherwood. All this exactly suited him.

"My idea is to dig up the deeds, take over the island according to Cocker, and then make things ready to put you up in comfort for as long a time as you care to stay with us—you and the others. The 'Isis' will have to be coaled and provisioned before she can turn about, and while that's going on it will be rather jolly for you to inspect my kingdom and have a general look round."

"Rather," said Sherwood. "All right, then. We'll all go ashore together, dine at the hotel, rejoin you in the morning and do Apia while you set things rolling. It's a small place. Everybody knows everybody else, I suppose, and you'll be able to spot your caretaker without any trouble. The deeds are

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essential to your establishing ownership, of course. Got the chart handy ? ”

Tony slapped his breast pocket with a triumphant smile, and, with a new suspicion born of what appeared to be a too casual inquiry, Chrissie made up her mind to become the keeper of the chart and carry it in her stocking.

This she did, to Tony's immense amusement, after they had packed their bags in readiness to land, or rather, after she had packed while Tony barged about the cabin, singing at one moment, whistling at another, and standing on one leg at a third like an awed penguin.

“ Oh God,” he said, once, during an unmusical and restful moment, “ how wonderful this is. The rotter transplanted back to his place on earth. ' Three hundred years recovered by a voyage . . . You married a man without a sovereign to his name, Chris, and in the twinkling of an eye he's going to make you a Queen. Who was the sceptic who had the impudence to say that the days of miracles are over ? ” And before he could be brought down from ecstasy by the performance of a useful job, he was marching round the cabin with his chin up, like a volunteer in the early days of the war, singing “ ' Old yer 'and out, naughty boy ”—the anthem of recruits.

The day's excitement came to a head when, while everybody talked at once, the beautiful “ Isis ” entered the broad straight passage to the Bay of Apia, and in due course made anchor a quarter of a mile off the beach. It was four o'clock in the afternoon and the sun was still high and golden above the mountain on which was the tomb of *Tushtala*. Three rusty looking tramp steamers with much washing hanging on

the yards were lying at anchor near-by, and there also was the "John Williams" of the London Missionary Society service. A Clydebuilt steamer this of some three thousand tons, not ungraceful as to lines, whose duty was to provision the various mission stations scattered about the islands of the Southwest Pacific, while she carried on a highly lucrative trading business to the disgust and active opposition of those who regarded themselves as more divinely appointed to make a profit out of native wants. On some of the smaller hills above the glistening town the spatulate hands of cocoanut trees were outspread against the sky. An ebb-tide was running past.

At the moment when the electric launch of the "Isis" was being lowered and the Stirling Fortescue's baggage stood ready to be let down a boat rowed by a wiry native put off from a craft that was also a new arrival, an old, dirty, patched hobo of a craft, a cross between a Norfolk wherry and a Ramsgate fishing smack. A fleeting attention was turned to it by Lady George, who won a laugh from Pollock by calling it the "Kitty Cornish." It was Sherwood who alone noticed the rowboat which, equally dirty and old, made a circle of the yacht before heading for a jetty. His interest was not in the boat but in the white man who sat in the stern giving a rasping order from time to time. A greasy pith helmet was stuck on the back of his head and made an appropriate frame for an arrestingly brutal face, fat and jowly, with pig's eyes, a flat nose and a large loose mouth from which dangled a limp cigarette. This unattractive person's curiosity in the yacht was so marked, and his expression of resentment at her appearance in those waters so evident, that Sherwood found himself

watching him to the exclusion of the far more enticing objects which were causing the delighted exclamations of his guests. "An ex-prizefighter," he thought, "probably escaped from a jail," and turned to look at Chrissie. It gave him an instant twinge of sympathy and resentment to see that instead of being dressed in clothes that were right for the climate and the place, she was wearing the sort of tailor-made suit in which she would have gone to a *matinée* on a dismal London day. Her hat, too, though becoming, was of some hot looking stuff and her stockings were woollen. He was obliged to confess that he had never seen her look more characteristically Chrissie than at that moment, so neat and natty, so charmingly slight and well fitted, so young and enchanting with her tip-tilted nose, ripe corn-coloured hair and eyes as blue as the sky. But how would she have been dressed if she had been *his* wife, with all his money at her utter disposal, tempted to spend for her adornment . . . Oh, God, it was harder and harder to bear.

Half an hour later when Sherwood stood guard over the bags on the quay, watching the launch return to the yacht for Tony and Chrissie who were saying "Good-bye" to the Captain, the other officers and the crew, he was affected suddenly by a queer hunch to turn round, and obeying it, caught the man in the pith helmet deliberately examining the luggage label that was attached to one of Tony's kit bags.

"Here, what are you doing," he sang out sharply.

The answer was even more to the point than the question. "What the 'ell's that got ter do wiv you."

"Wh-at! If you don't mind your own damn business I'll chuck you off the jetty."

"Yer will, eh ? Oh."

The man in the pith helmet slowly straightened up. Six foot two, and weighing fifteen stone at a rough guess, with a width of shoulder that was Gargantuan and a chest beneath an old blue, almost buttonless, shirt that would have been the envy of a professional weight lifter, *he* was the one to do the chucking, it appeared.

And so Sherwood wisely hedged. "Well, if you want to know anything, I suppose you can ask," he said, ready to leap away if one of those hard brown arms reached out. The man touched the kit bag with the toe of a shoe which had not been cleaned in its life. "Gor blimey," he said, in the voice of one who sees something in which he has never believed. "If this don't tike the blinkin' cike."

From the window of a near-by warehouse there came the tinny strains of a fox-trot from a hissing gramophone. "How yer gonna keep 'em down on ther farm after they've seen Parree."

Sherwood was puzzled. What was there about an ordinary kitbag to move this benighted heathen to such profound surprise ? "The first time you've ever seen a civilized piece of luggage ?" he asked.

There was the most scathing contempt in the two pig eyes that ran slowly over Sherwood's body. "Taint ther bag, yer blinkin' little fool. And it ain't so much the nime. It's my comin' in at the sime time as that there blinkin' yawt." If the word *occult* had had a place in his abbreviated dictionary he might have used it then. "It's blinkin' wonderful, strike me if it ain't." And after further rumination he added, "This mornin' I 'adn't no more idea of comin' across to Apia than playin' the blinkin' 'arp.

Why should I? I didn't warnt nothin'. I'd took over baccy, booze and a girl the last trip. They'd last me over ther month, I sez. But after mid-day grub, ther feelin' come over me to tike the boat. I tikes it, catches sight of that there sea dandy makin' the Bay—more blinkin' tourists—lands, gets the feelin' ter look at the label . . . Stirling Fortescue be God! And if that ain't blinkin' wonderful, what is?"

The question seemed to require an answer. All that Sherwood could say was, "I don't see what that name can mean to you."

"Why should yer? Yer don't know who I am. But I don't mind tellin' yer, me boy, I was brought up on ther nime of Stirling, 'ad it in mer food and swipes and it was 'anded darn ter me by me father that night 'e turns 'is toes up over acrost."

"I must be very far from bright," said Sherwood, "because there's nothing in all this that conveys anything to me."

"Then *you* ain't Stirling Fortescue, that's certain."

"No, I'm not," and he didn't see any point in adding to that confidential creature that he wished to God he were.

"But it *will* convey summat to Stirling Fortescue when he noses up ter me. And I'll tell yer why right now. I'm Bill Quex, I am. Yuss. Son of ther man wot was left in charge of Paradise. No error. But 'e's dead and so's Lord Stirling, and I was born on the island and 'as squatter's rights. In other words, the island's *my* island, sec, and I'd like ter meet ther blinkin' blighter wot 'as thoughts of turnin' me out. No wonder I 'ad the feelin' to take ther boat to-day."

"I see your point," said Sherwood. "But my friend Stirling Fortescue who has timed his arrival with yours is here to obtain the island, and all he's got to do is to produce the deeds, lay them before the Governor or the Consul, and out you go, of course."

"Yuss, but that ain't so blinkin' easy," said Bill Quex.

"Why isn't it?"

"Why? Because accordin' to ther legend wot I've grown up with all me life them blinkin' deeds weren't never took 'ome by old man Stirling. See? And as they ain't at Government 'Ouse, and they ain't, boss, and me father never 'ad 'em, where the 'ell are they? Produce the deeds, will 'e? Where from?"

"Don't you think there are duplicates in Government House?"

"Maybe. I don't give a damn. I've got the only proof of ownership that's worth a lawyer's fee. Squatter's rights, see? Squatter's rights, Gov'nor, since day of birth. The law's the law out here same as anywhere else." He laughed, disclosing a faulty line of teeth. Then he spat, turned on his heels and walked away.

"Wait a second," cried Sherwood, who began to see in this queer meeting the inspiration that he had hoped to find on shore.

"Orl right," said Bill Quex, turning. "My time's cheap."

Sherwood shot a quick glance at the yacht. The launch was lying alongside. In a moment or two Tony, Chrissie and the others would be on their way to the jetty. If it were possible to start a line that would disturb the confidence of this usurping King and with it his active antagonism, it must be attempted at once,

he saw. "If the law is the same out here as everywhere else," he said, "I don't think you've been long enough on the island to establish squatter's rights, Mr. Quex."

"Yer don't, eh?" The anxiety in his voice went to prove that he had been asserting a fact of which he was none too certain, after all. "Who the 'ell arsted yer ter think abart it, anyway? It ain't got nothin' ter do wiv you."

"But apart from that you have no objection, have you, to a feeling of sympathy in this matter?"

"Sympathy! God blimey. I don't want no blinkin' sympathy." He was positively outraged.

"Then it's no use my wasting breath. It occurred to me that I might have been able to give you a useful tip." Sherwood turned on his heel. Would it work? Would it?

"'Ere, 'old on, Gov'nor," said Quex, making a long arm and putting a powerful and unclean hand on Sherwood's shoulder. "No offence took where none's intended."

The smile of self-approval on Sherwood's face could pass very well for one of cordial understanding. It worked, as the turn away had done, with complete success. Quex came out of his swagger, his sham assurance. He disclosed a perfectly human anger and pitifulness. He said, "Wot's ther blinkin' idea of this 'ere feller comin' to the South Seas anyway, eh? Ain't 'e got enough lands without ankerin' after a little bit of an island wot's 'ome ter me and mine? 'Is father never 'ad no use fer it, never sent a word about it, never give it a thought. It wasn't even a sentiment to 'im. Why should this blinkin' toff wiv 'is floatin' pallis come sniffin' around on a whim, eh?

'E won't give a couple of curses about evictin' a cove as was born to the plice, who scratches a livin' off of it, and blinkin' well belongs. • You bet yer life 'e won't. Orl right then, I shall put up a blinkin' fight ter stick, see ? And when I starts *that* game the fur begins ter fly. Do yer blame me, Gov'ner ? "

"No," said Sherwood. "Not under these particular circumstances." How excellent this was ! The luck of such a meeting ! "Go warily," he said to himself. "Plant temptation in this brute's mind, the hope of keeping what he considers to be his property, and things will go my way."

"Well, you're orl right, you are."

"Thanks," said Sherwood, submitting to a handshake that made the bones of his fingers ache. "And let me tell you before I forget it that I and not Mr. Stirling Fortescue am the owner of the yacht. He has nothing but the baggage you see here, and the island left to him by his father. As to those deeds . . . "

"Ah ! "

"I can't see any reason why you shouldn't know that he carries a chart in his pocket showing the spot on the island where his eccentric parent buried them years and years ago. I've seen it."

"Oh, you 'ave, eh ? "

"Yes, and so can you by the exercise of a little tact."

"Wocher mean ? "

"Once you get him to the privacy of the island with the cordial welcome of a caretaker glad to be relieved of his responsibility . . . "

The two men held each other's eyes. The wound on Sherwood's face became a fiery red.

"But I thought I 'eard yer say as 'e were a friend of yours ? "

"A figure of speech, Mr. Quex."

The silence was broken only by "How yer gonna keep 'em down on ther farm after they've seen Paree," until Sherwood put into sudden vitriolic words the kernel of his trouble.

"I hate that man like Hell."

"That *is* a useful tip," said Mr. Quex.

PART V

I

THE launch ran alongside the jetty with the grace of a swan.

The expression in the eyes of his new and helpful acquaintance as he leaned forward to give his hand to the little lady opened up to Bill Quex a long story of jealousy and desire. "And I don't wonder," he said to himself, with instant appreciation. "A reg'lar bit of orl-right, not 'alf she ain't." Born on the island of a Shoreditch mother, it was from her as well as from a Billingsgate father that he had caught his Cockney accent.

"Hurrah!" cried Tony as he put his feet on the planks. He hid a strong emotion behind the inevitable smile as he brought up his hand in a gracious salute to an imaginary guard of honour. In the quickly dissolving picture that was flashed on his mind there were not only Samoan braves in their elaborate warpaint, as he had seen them in the books of the yacht, and men in the uniform of the R.A.F. whose faces he knew so well, but several of the London bobbies with whom he had passed many jocular words before and after the War, and whose left eyelids invariably closed in a wink in which there was a comical mixture of warning and friendship.

"But where are the others?" asked Sherwood with a shade of testiness.

"Mr. Pollock persuaded Lady George and the Colonel to remain on board to-night," said Chrissie,

carrying the chart in her stocking and a make-up bag on her arm.

"Why?"

"He said it would be dark soon and thought it would be better to get a first impression of Apia under the morning sun. He asked me to tell you so."

"Like him to upset my arrangements," said Sherwood, glad, as it happened, that they had remained aboard. In the light of his unexpected understanding with the benighted heathen it fitted admirably. "I'll return to the yacht with you, Evans," he added, raising a finger to the officer in charge of the launch.

"Aye, aye, sir."

"Oh no, old man," said Tony. "You're dining with us at the hotel, although there doesn't seem to be anything or anybody to take us there." "Unless," he thought, "this heavyweight ex-prize fighter is on the look-out for a job."

Chrissie was far too honest to join in the persuasion. It was her great hope that she and Tony might never see Teddy Sherwood again.

It was not without an effort that Sherwood was able to achieve a casual tone. "But there won't be any need for you to go to the hotel," he said.

"Won't there?" Then here was a disruption of Tony's plans.

"Why?" Chrissie had held that in the hotel there would have been a certain amount of safety.

"Well," said Sherwood, "through what is to me a very happy accident, though no doubt to Chrissie it comes under the heading of 'meant'—he could now afford to be heavily playful with that word—"you

can go straight from here to your island without any hanging about."

Tony was astonished and delighted. "What? Where is the island? How do you know we can?"

"Let me introduce Mr. Quex," said Sherwood, thoroughly enjoying himself, "the son of the man, no longer with us, whom your father left in charge."

Tony wheeled round.

Whereupon, bearing in mind the injunction to be tactful, Bill Quex raised his filthy old pith helmet. Not even the oldest of his cowed, detesting and brow-beaten natives had ever seen their despot give so amazing an imitation of a good-natured grin.

"Great Scot!" said Tony. "Is this . . . is this true?"

Chrissie had been brought up among caretakers—widows who camped in the basements of empty houses and elderly men who got up at night to sit before brasiers in front of new buildings or the wreckage of old ones—but never one like this huge mass of man with his semi-familiar leer, that careless shirt and those antiquated trousers which bore the lengthy story of activities on land and sea. In all her youthful experience caretakers were respectable people.

"No error," said Bill Quex, airily. "Bill Quex of Paradise, that's me. Everybody'll answer for that. Son of Bill Quex, the trader, wot took over for Lord Stirling away back before the Great Wind. First the old man and then me has kept the island runnin' nice and quiet fer wot we could get off of it, and I thought it was forgot. But it's better late than never and I'm glad to see yer, Mr. Stirling Fortescue, I'm sure."

"This is immense," said Tony, characterizing the

meeting and not the great hard hand which he grasped with his amazing trustfulness. "I expected to be about two days looking for you. My wife." He waved his hand towards Chrissie.

Seeing in the island a haven of refuge and in this enormous person a body-guard for Tony, Chrissie recovered from her shock at the sight of his garments. "I'm very glad to meet you," she said.

Quex had never seen any eyes of quite that shade of blue, any face so like an English flower, any figure so small and so appealing. He made another bow. It would have thrown all Paradise into a panic.

And then Sherwood jumped in quickly. Things were shaping well. "Mr. Quex was just suggesting, as far as I could gather, that if you sail at once on his yawl—that's the one, out there—you can get to the island before sundown and fish those deeds up while the light hangs out."

"That's so," said Quex, answering quickly to his cue. "But as there ain't much wind we'd better nip right in." He loaded himself with the baggage and lopped along to the boat. "If you're going to do it, get it done," was his motto.

"A great idea," said Tony, somehow not in the least surprised at this coincidental meeting. Always things had gone like this for him since Chrissie had brought him luck. "Quex obviously is a man of action. Well then, Teddy, as soon as I know how things are and where to put up and all that, I'll get our tame giant to sail us to the yacht. Then we'll act as pilot and guide you into Paradise for as long a stay as you like. Meantime, old boy, I can't find words sufficiently to thank you for performing this miracle. All I can say is that Chrissie and I will

never forget your kindness as long as we live, even if that brings us to the time when we are the last remaining King and Queen on earth."

"Very glad, old man," said Sherwood. "In spite of everything I'm your friend, you know."

Tony picked up the two remaining suit cases, one of which contained all Chrissie's things. With these, and with dancing eyes, he followed Quex to the row boat, singing "Oh, here I come with my little lot . . ." He was as happy as on the day when war had been declared.

And so, once again, Chrissie was alone with Teddy Sherwood.

"*I can find words,*" she said, giving him her hand. "Thank you, Teddy. May you find a better girl than me in London."

The blood mounted to Sherwood's head so that he could hardly see. He alone knew the agony that he had suffered in being so close to her on the "Isis" and yet so desperately far away. And now she was going out of his sight, until such time as Quex had dealt with the interloper. And then, with a widow aboard, the return journey, the country house, the reward of long waiting. His repeated failures to wipe out Tony, who was, as he had had to confess, the better man, made him infinitely thankful to throw the onus of the business upon the broad shoulders of the squatter. *He* would do the trick with the help of a trustworthy native. How else could he remain in possession of what had become part of himself? With a most gigantic effort he maintained his glassy smile and most benevolent expression. "My dear Chrissie," he said, "there's absolutely nothing that I wouldn't do for you. Remember that."

There were blinding tears in the eyes of this queer, adoring, egomaniac when he sat in the stern of the spic and span launch, and it was through these that he saw the weighed down row boat on its laborious way to the shabby craft, in which Chrissie was sitting smiling at the elbow of big Bill Quex with Tony at her feet. The native was pulling out his heart.

"So long Teddy."

"So long, old man. So long, Chrissie."

"So long," she said, waving her hand.

He missed the look in Quex's bright pig's eyes. But he knew and rejoiced that it was there.

And from the rail of the yacht, against which Mortimer Pollock and Algernon Lumley were leaning watching the two so different departures from the jetty, Lady George voiced the general surprise. "Well, I'm diddled," she said. "What's caused the bally revulsion of all them plans?"

"Revolution," corrected Pollock, with the daring of one who was not, and never would have been, her husband. "Ask Sherwood when he comes. Well, as this is the hour when the daily cycle of vitality takes its most depressing dip, a whiskey and soda is the tonic I prescribe. Coming, Lumley?"

"I am," said Lady George.

II

Tony loved the age, the filth, and the primitive fittings of the broad-beamed yawl with its brown sail patched in many places. Far from having a lowering effect upon his spirits, it sent them even higher than they were. How incongruous it would have been to

have made this romantic journey in anything but an old and worm-eaten craft. It is true that in his dreams on the yacht he had seen himself and Chrissie swept triumphantly to the island by a dozen brown-skinned warriors who chanted to the rhythmic dip of gleaming paddles, while the braves of his kingdom followed in a long procession of swiftly moving canoes. But this was obviously due to his having spent long and glowing hours poring eagerly over the pictures in South Sea Island books. He recognized an essential rightness in this dilapidated wherry built by the hands of white men. He was white, the kind, white king, returning after a long exile to his coloured people over whom he was to rule with as keen and as imaginative an understanding of their needs and feelings as he had displayed in his command of the men who had become just as primeval in the war. The fact that he had succeeded in his leadership of these made him confident of success among the equally simple human creatures to whom he was sailing then. And as his island stood out more and more plainly on the horizon his heart expanded, his spirit warmed, and a sense of great responsibility fell upon his shoulders like a royal cloak. Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown? Not his head, because as a Wing Commander he had served already a valuable apprenticeship in king stuff and knew his job.

In the curiously simple way that remained to him in spite of city sophistication and the wear and tear of having dodged starvation and police, he was profoundly moved. This was the end of his quest. He was now to begin life again in the age to which he had been born. He had been permitted actually to perform an act, completely unknown to science, of

turning back the pages of his life to the place to which he belonged.

And this, approached in three wide leisurely tacks, was a typical Samoan island, though larger, perhaps, than most, with native houses scattered irregularly about the margin of a green wall of palms, the small cove of its lagoon sheltered somewhat by a rough pier of coral, with landing stairs, and a harbour light upon a crooked pole. A thunder of surf came from the right and left, and a soft wind played among the canopy of cocoa-palms beneath which a smooth flow of white sand gleamed in the sunlight. There was not a soul to be seen. The tide had turned and the bevy of dilapidated sail boats which, at high tide, had been loaded with bags of copra at the pier, now lay out in the lagoon. The slow-moving natives who had been working earlier in the day, trailing across the sands in strings and clusters, wading to the waist with loaded bags, and loitering back to renew their charge, were now at leisure under their fibre roofs. Crickets sang, insects whistled in the tufts of weeds, mosquitoes hummed and stung. The cheerful watch-cry of cocks rang out at intervals above the incessant roar.

"All change for Paradise" sang out Quex, repeating one of his London-bred father's inevitable whimsies, and giving an order to the watching native. Down came the clattering sail and out plopped the anchor into the rippling transparent water which was alive with fish of fantastic colours and floored with blossoms of branching coral.

Chrissie laughed. This remark, in the familiar accent of a tube conductor, warmed her heart. Gross, brutal and dirty as their new friend was, he

evidently possessed the saving grace of humour, which was good.

Tony sprang to his feet and waved his cap at the island which, at last, had become an actual fact.

Quex hauled the towed row boat alongside. The baggage had been left in her. And then he turned his face to Chrissie with what he considered was a most bewitching smile. "Ladies first," he said.

Tony, bareheaded because this lady was a queen, helped her into the boat of ancient ribs, and presently out upon the coral steps of the pier, and then he said in a low and not quite steady voice "Welcome home, your Majesty."

Telling his boatman to remain where he was until someone was sent to help him with the bags, Quex gave a very necessary hitch to his reckless trousers and led the way to the village. "Yer won't 'ave fur ter walk," he said, still playing his unusual game of tact, though he felt uncommonly like the spider inviting unsuspecting flies into his parlour. "My old Dad took blinkin' good care ter build 'is 'ouse on the best spot, as I think you'll agree when yer sees it."

Beneath a roof of palms the alley was smoothed and weeded. Plants grew here and there. Dusky huts clustered in the shadow and to the primitive verandas of these, men, women and children came out to gaze in round-eyed wonder—the men naked but for the official loin cloth, the women in the precarious *lava-lava* or *Cappa*, which encircled their ample waists, the children "clothed on in chastity."

"The 'and of the blinkin' missionary," said Quex. With a satirical jerk of his pith helmet he indicated a small building at the end of the alley with two pointed towers each surmounted with a cross. Mosses and

lichens, mosaics of many shades of green, faint touches of red and yellow mould covered the decaying walls. "We turn off 'ere," he added, wheeling to the right, "where you'll rub y'er eyes to see the 'ouse that Bill built, the show place of Paradise." There was a strong note of pride and affection in his voice, as well there might have been.

It was not a hut or a shack at which they looked, but a villa, large and comfortable, strongly and firmly built with logs, one-storeyed it is true, but with a veranda front and back, a thatched roof, set down in an oblong enclosure covered with clinkers of smashed coral where cocoa-palms and mikis and fig trees flourished. A pergola of bananas led from the wicket gate to the front veranda. At the back a bulwark of uncemented coral, like an Irish wall, enclosed the place from the rampageous bush. A wide opening gave a sudden and breath-taking view of the blue lagoon. The roar and wash of the sea overcame all other sounds. It was a dramatic and an enchanting spot.

"There y'are," said Bill Quex. "Wot price that fer a little bit of orl-right!"

He jerked the gate open, once more removed his old pith helmet in a sweeping bow and showed his bankrupt teeth in a gleeful grin.

And as he did so the person to whom he had referred briefly in his talk to Sherwood—"bacey, booze and a girl"—came out and lolled against the door in a frock of canary yellow, her oval face made all the whiter by the contrast of her jet black, smarmed down hair, dark Semetic eyes and beef-red lips, stood with one foot crossed over the other and her hands upon her hips.

•

The snarling words she got from Quex were "Go on in and 'ide."

III

"How perfectly corking," said Tony, standing in the sitting room. "By Jove, one easily might be in—I dunno, Calcutta, perhaps, or Egypt. Not that I know those places."

Bill Quex was flattered. "Yer mean yer never expected ter find anythin' like this 'ere on a South Sea Island, eh?"

"Yes. Did you, Chris?"

"I don't think I did," she said, all the more amazed at the brightness and cleanness of everything when she glanced again at the unkempt owner of the house.

"Well," said Quex, in high good humour, "I'll tell yer 'ow it is. Before my old father turned up 'is tradin' business, 'e was livin' in Apia, in one of them shack's near Government 'Ouse. Things had gorn agin' 'im, and 'e was that darn on 'is luck 'e were precious glad fer ter take that job *your* father offered 'im of lookin' arter this. So bein' a religious man and all like that, what 'eld ter weddin' rings and sich, he arsted ther widder of a tramp steamer Captin, wot 'ad died on the way acrost, ter be 'is wife and share 'is lot on Paradise. This she did and gladly—he were a fine looking man, an' ther two of 'em come over and built this place with lovin' care, meanin' ter spend ther rest of their days in 'appiness and comfort. Me mother was used ter nice things and was a proper 'ousewife, and bit by bit she sends to San Francisco

fer the furniture and fittins, same as yer see. All this 'ere wicker furniture come over on the tramp 'er first 'usband croaked on. Made in Japan, it was, wear fer ever, it will. Tables and pictures and the bedroom stuff, which is a treat. They all come from Frisco too. And ther books, though my old man made the shelves and that there desk which nobody never used. These 'ere fibre rugs the natives made—ther women; it's part of their game. Not so bad, neither. And out of respect for the old couple and because I'm blinkin' fond of the place I sees that my people keeps it clean and all licked up, just as it were in the old days when I were a nipper, larkin' round. That's the idea, y'see. And, of course, *I* ain't allers in this 'ere disherbill. Oh no! I lopped over to Apia on a sudden 'unch and these is me workin' clothes."

He laughed with real good humour because nothing delighted him so much as showing off to visitors the place he called the 'omestead of which he was so proud.

With a dash of Royal kindness in his winning smile Tony turned to his affable host. "I want you to understand at once, Quex," he said, "that you and this charming place will never be disturbed by me. When I take over the island, I hope that we may come to a perfectly agreeable arrangement under which you will carry on as my overseer. The life here is, of course, utterly new to me and I shall be immensely grateful for your advice and help. And if you will allow us to board with you until we can knock up a house for ourselves you will add to my great indebtedness. What do you say?"

The blasphemy that rose to Quex's mouth at this calm assumption of proprietorship, this patronizing offer to remain on what he held to be his own property

as a sort of useful servant, almost burst. Just in time, however, he remembered Sherwood's warning to be tactful until such time as he could possess himself by hook or by crook first of the chart and then of the deeds which, having been destroyed, would leave him in indisputable possession. And so he swallowed his rage, covered his hesitation with a rheumy cough and re-adopted his air of half-deferential, half-familiar friendliness.

"I say, yes" he answered. "Write O.K. on that. And now if you'll sit down and make yerselves 'appy, I'll go and see that me mother's room is put in order for yer, say a word abart the evenin' prog, 'ave yer baggage put in, and there we are, all fixed."

Whereupon, being unable to trust himself any longer to an unaccustomed concealment of his consuming wrath, he stumped out of the living room and shut the door.

It was, perhaps, a blessed thing for Tony and Chrissie that they were unable to hear his sultry outpouring in a distant room to the flamboyant lady in the canary coloured frock. It certainly must have shaken their quickly grown confidence in the worthy caretaker whose love for his father and mother put an aureole round that house.

Tony turned and darted at Chrissie, his boyish face alight, his eyes gleaming. "Well? What do you think of it? Is it anything like the sort of thing that you expected?"

"It's better," said Chrissie joyfully. "Far better. The island's lovely, and oh my word, the colours! I don't know whether I shall ever get used to the noise of the sea—I suppose so; I always loved to hear the traffic—but otherwise it might be dreamland."

And if this man found it perfectly easy to build a practical house like this, we can, can't we, Tony ? ”

“ Rather. Twice the size, if you'd like it. And the only thing I vote we do in the morning before anything else is to go out and hunt for the site, a more excellent spot than this even.”

“ Yes, but not before you've found the deeds, I think, and established your identity, as Mr. Pollock said.”

Where would he be in his impractical enthusiasm without the common sense of his little wife ? “ Yes,” he said. “ Quite. This man's unquestioning acceptance of us drove that deed business clean out of my head. All that over then, we'll send an order to San Francisco for wicker and beds and tables and all the rest of the things like these. If they're here by the time the rest of the house is ready we can settle down at once.”

There was a slight hesitation on Chrissie's part. No one had ever accused her of being a wet blanket, especially in anything which concerned her beloved but innately ingenuous Tony. But the hard facts of life, of which she had known so many, had made her cautious. And so she said, “ That sounds most awfully well, old boy, but all those things cost money, and where's that coming from ? ”

But only for a moment was Tony crestfallen. And then, with a sweep of his hand and the old familiar smile, a ready answer came. “ This island makes money,” he said. “ You heard Pollock's lecture on the value of the cocoanut. As soon as I've proved my rights and taken over I shall begin to draw royalties—or something. The place is mine, the natives work for wages, and what's over comes to me. After all,

you know, Quex's old man came here broke, built this place and did himself pretty well all his life. And as to Quex himself . . . "

• He stopped abruptly.

• "Well?" asked Chrissie.

His line of argument had led to an unexpected turn of thought. "By Jove," he went on, following it with a generous enthusiasm, "that man's a most unusual sort of fellow. Very honest and excellent. Under these circumstances most men would have been pretty sick to see us turn up like this, like bolts from the blue, to do them out of something which they had grown to look at as their own. But Quex's attitude is extraordinarily nice. Anyone would think that he'd been expecting all his life to see us. As it is he's going to slip down from complete ownership to a position of second fiddle. We must be jolly kind to good old Quex, Chris."

"Yes, we must indeed," she said.

"And now for the chart," said Tony. "There ought to be just enough time before the light goes to find the spot where my father buried the deeds. Extraordinary chap! I wonder why he did it?"

But just as Chrissie was about to delve into her stocking for the precious piece of paper, Quex flung open the door and marched into the room with so heavy a step that the whole place seemed to shake. He was followed by three native men, two of whom, without any relish, were holding a third, who was in a condition of jibbering fear.

Quex spoke immediately in a loud and raucous voice. He was angry, that was obvious. His face was red and the veins in his neck were swollen. He looked gross and bestial. All signs of his self-imposed

tactfulness had gone. "Jist git out on ther veranda," he said to Tony, "quick. I've got a bit of legal work ter do. Nip off and take the gal. Sharp's the word."

It was a very extraordinary *volte-face*, but Tony obeyed the order from force of habit, and wondering what was going to happen to the shaking culprit, stood with his arm round Chrissie's shoulder. As Quex was still in command he told himself that he must, of course, carry out what he called his legal work in the regulation way. It wasn't for him at that moment to interfere.

There was the crack of a whip, a yell of pain, a scuffle, a harsh order, the opening and closing of a door. Then high above the incessant roar of the sea, a series of screams so piercing and so full of agony that the blood of the two astonished listeners turned instantly to ice. They stood rooted to the veranda.

Then an ominous silence, followed by further orders, the opening and shutting of a door, and a shuffling of naked feet as though under the burden of a heavy weight.

And before Tony could recover from his surprise and shock a huge form loomed against the doorway in the rosy light of the setting sun.

"A lovely evening," said Mr. Quex.

IV

A rather strained affair, that evening meal.

Served in the living room by two silent-footed native women who looked at Quex from time to time with furtive loathing, it was eaten at the table near

an open window which was covered by mosquito netting. Light was provided by two large kerosene lamps, one on the table and the other on the unused desk. Both of them competed in sending out a most distressing odour. Chrissie was spared the presence of the lady in the yellow frock who fortunately remained in hiding.

Quex had combed his thin grey hair, washed his murky hands, and put a fairly respectable jacket over his gaping shirt. But as the meal progressed his conversational efforts became intermittent and stopped when he sat lumpishly in obvious rumination, chewing the cud of reflection like a cow.

The screams of the poor creature who had been punished in that mysterious room behind them had so startled and horrified Tony and Chrissie that they ate little and said nothing. They had not the faintest idea as to what form of torture he had been subjected or what was the nature of his crime. It had been made obvious, however, during those brief but hideous moments that under his veneer of breeziness and urbanity Quex was nothing but a bully and a brute. It had been impossible to talk the matter over together but they agreed, and telegraphed this agreement across the unappetising table, that this way of dispensing law was not their way under any circumstances, and that the sooner the deeds were found and their claim established the better it would be for the people of that island.

According to the picturesque way in which Tony liked to put it, they had gone back deliberately into a time that was several hundred years less civilized than the one from which they had sailed. They had, therefore, to expect a greater number of shocks in

their discovery of the morals and manners of their unprohibited islanders than they had received in London from blasé observation, and the careless perusal of the daily papers. They had already caught a glimpse of the native costumes which disclosed a more daring and disconcerting view of the female form than even they had been used to at *Ciro's* and the other dancing clubs. And there would be, of course, other minor surprises of which they had not read in the travel books on the yacht. All very well and good. There would be a considerable amount of newness and charm in the customs and crudities of an unself-conscious people, who as yet, even though they had come under the influence of the missionaries, were far more free from the devastating effects of an army of faddists and kill-joys than the people of the civilization that they had left. But in the dispensation of the few necessary laws and regulations as to which, as an ex-flying officer, Tony was in complete sympathy, he drew the line at torture, and made up his mind, during the course of that peculiarly trying meal, to issue an edict to that effect at the earliest possible moment. The room seemed still to echo with those most frightful screams.

But the moment was long in coming.

The baggage was brought up from the pier, placed, with many directions from Quex, in his mother's old room, which was comfortable and rather like one that might have been found in any number of the middle-class flats in the Putney Road, or the neat frame houses in the suburbs of San Francisco.

Then a man came in who seemed to be a mixture of warehouse clerk and tramp ship-mate, which, as a matter of fact, he was, as well as a dozen other things.

And he was Glasgow from his unmistakable accent, short, aggressive legs, and fiery red hair. He was withdrawn immediately into a corner by Quex, when there followed a long conversation in undertones which left a reek of shag upon the air. Certain orders seemed to be given to him about the loading of copra, which word was used a hundred times. Apia, weather and whiskey were among the others that Tony caught while Chrissie was unpacking and feeling very hot.

Through one of the windows Tony could see the light of the lantern on the pier, the smooth water of the lagoon in which were reflected the glimmer of a million stars, the glow of a fire of cocoanut husk in the deep shadow of a palm grove. The aromatic smell of this was wafted on the gentle breeze. There was always the booming of the sea upon the breakers.

And when, after the disappearance of the Scotsman who had looked at Tony with curiosity in his red-fringed eyes, Chrissie announced that she was going to bed and said "good-night," Quex brought forth a bottle of Johnny Walker, and shed his offending coat.

"Bring up a chair," he said. "It's time we 'ad a tork." He let himself into a creaking wicker sofa, re-loaded and lit a gurgling briar pipe.

Tony did so, and as he sat the light of the lamp upon the near-by table threw up the fine outline of his profile against the darkness of the wall. "I've been waiting since dinner for this," he said.

Quex flicked the match into a corner and wiped the perspiration from his forehead. And although he had returned to his earlier affable manner there was nothing in his voice of a subordinate respect. "I want ter know summat abart that cove wot owns that

blinkin' yawl," he said, puffing freely with enjoyment. "Rich, er course."

"Yes," said Tony, "very rich."

"E'd 'ave ter be, runnin' abart the sea in a ship that size. An oldish friend o' yourn, Gov'nor?"

"My oldest friend," said Tony. "We were in the Air Force together the whole way through the war."

"War?" Quex echoed the word with a note of interrogation as who should say "Wot blinkin' war do yer mean?" Then, with a faint recollection of having heard some talk about a fairly recent fracas he added, "Oh ah, that."

It was all so absolutely unaffected that Tony laughed. He was indeed three hundred years behind the times.

"Your oldest friend, eh? . . . Did he ever tell yer as 'ow he was absoblinkinlootely dippy abart yer wife?"

"How the—how the dickens did you know that?"

Quex poured out a stiff drink, disposed of it with a well-practised jerk and drew the back of his hand across his large, loose mouth. "Shouldn't wonder if it was second sight," he said, with a loud guffaw at what he considered to be a very witty answer. "But anyway, 'e brought you out to ther island orlright and you couldn't ask more than that, could yer? And bein' 'ere, wot's the next thing, Gov'nor? Prove 'oo you are to the blinkin' consul over acrost and show yer papers, eh? That it?"

"That's it," said Tony.

"Yuss, but where *are* them blinkin' papers, if I might arst you the question, bein' interested like. 'If you've got 'em anywhere 'andy I'd like ter look 'em over."

"Well, they're not exactly handy, as it happens," said Tony. "But you'll see them in due course, probably."

"I'll blinkin' well 'ave to, won't I? Me first, so ter speak." He gave another guffaw as though he found something very amusing in all this.

Tony put his rather insolent question down to the whiskey. All the same he had to confess to himself that there was an underlying suggestiveness in the man's tone that might lead to a sharp reproof. He was relieved at the fact that Chrissie had gone to bed.

"An' talkin' abart second sight," said Quex, measuring Tony with his bright pig's eyes, "wot's all this abart a blinkin' chart? Got a bit o' paper drawn on by yer dear old Dad wot shows the place where he buried them deeds, 'aven't yer, Gov'nor? Come on now. Tell the truth."

Tony got up and went to the table. He felt the need of being on his feet. "I have," he answered shortly. "I suppose that's the legend here."

Seeing that he had gone too far and not wishing to arouse suspicions, Quex began to hedge. His rumination at dinner had resulted in two conclusions. Either he must steal the chart from the belongings of his unwelcome guest and use it as a pipe lighter, or obtain it from this apparently easy person who had walked so trustfully into the spider's web by a wily bluff. And if both these methods failed—well then for other ways. He was blinkin' well going to keep the island, he knew that.

"Yuss," he said. "Legend, that's the word. 'Anded darn from father to son stuff, same way as you got the chart. Don't take no offence at my bein' playful. That's Bill Quex, that is, arter 'es lowered a

tot. Then there's another thing you've got ter bear in mind. I've only got *your* word for 'oo you are, 'aven't I? Stirling Fortescue on ther label, an' all like that. Certainly. Oh dear y'es. An' I've only ter look at yer to see it's on the level, er course. Wot O! But what I mean is I *am* ther caretaker fer old Lord Stirling, ain't I, alive or dead, and as sich shall be 'eld responsible for any slight mistake. That's right, ain't it, Gov'nor? That's the sort o' thing you'd be the first to expect from an honest man?" He was very winning and simple. There was no guile in him. Oh dear no. Only half a glass of whiskey.

"I see your point," said Tony. "I intend to establish my claim in the proper legal way. You needn't worry about that."

"That's the idea," said Quex heartily. "Everything clean and nice, same as I like it." He rose like an unattacked Gulliver from the groaning wicker. "Orl right, then. I advise that you give me that there chart to-night so that I can study it very careful afore I goes ter me innocent couch, and then I shall know where to start operations first thing in ther morning. Save a lot er time." He held out a massive hand.

But an uncharacteristic caution held Tony at that moment. The half sheet of note paper which had been left to him by his father was now the most precious thing that he owned, the only thing that stood between what he liked to call kingship and an ignominious return to London and a jobless life. There was, too, a certain flash of most disturbing antagonism in this man's eye which belied his assumption of helpfulness. It would have to be watched and guarded against.

"I'll show it to you after breakfast," said Tony,

“ thanks very much all the same. And now, if you’ll excuse me, I think I’ll go to bed. I shall sleep like a log to-night.” He gave his host a smileless nod and went across to the door.

It was a pity that he missed the anger that flamed into Quex’s face.

The moment came, however, when Tony turned in the doorway and fixed a Wing Commander’s eyes upon the caretaker.

“ And by the way,” he added, “ I don’t like the way you have of treating culprits.”

“ Oh, you don’t, eh ? ”

“ I certainly do not. And take it from me at once that I refuse to permit it.”

“ Oh dear me. Just fancy that now.”

Was this whiskey or insubordination ?

“ Do you understand, or shall I put it in blunter words than those ? ”

This blankety-blinkin’ toff ! ‘Oo the ‘ell ! Got a lot of pluck orl right standin’ ’is ground like that there. One blow and he was dead. Now, now, tact, tact.

“ Very good. I thoroughly understand.” God, what a cheek.

“ Good-night, then, Mr. Quex,” said Tony. “ I’m greatly obliged to you.”

“ Good-night, Gov’nor ” said Mr. Quex. “ Many ‘appy dreams.”

V

And finally, after undressing very quietly in order not to disturb Chrissie, Tony, being blessed with youth and its glorious optimism, did sleep like a log.

On the way to bed he had, however, reviewed the state of things.

It was natural after all, he told himself, that this man who had been born on, and made his living out of, that island should have been considerably jarted by the sudden arrival of its claimants after all his years of sole and complete possession. Perfectly natural. What would have been his own feelings under a reversal of the position? On the whole, therefore, he had behaved extremely well. The point was justly and rightly taken, too, as to his having accepted the interlopers on their face value. The caretaker of another man's property, it was his duty to be satisfied as to the identity of his wholly unexpected visitors and the authenticity of their claim, obviously. There was no doubt about that. Also it was human to hope that there might be something fishy in all this which would prevent his being deposed from his hitherto uncontested seat, and if he intended to put up a fight he had every right on his side. Should he in spite of his appearance and his brutal methods of punishing delinquents turn out to be a rough but honest man, the production of the deeds and their lodgment with the consul would be all that was needed to make him resign with cheerfulness and accept with stoicism the new regime. Should he, on the contrary, live up to his ugliness and show any definite signs of the rascality that he had suggested once or twice, the greatest care must be taken to keep the priceless chart away from him with its tremendous temptation to play the crooked game.

As one who had lived on his wits and been in command of men in war, Tony had great knowledge of human nature. Like a doctor, a lawyer, a banker,

or a card sharp, it had been his business—his only one before the war when everything had changed—to study men. The result of all this and of his service had been to give him a deep-seated faith in the human race. Treated with kindness, imagination and understanding, good, bad and indifferent men all responded; cowards warmed into a false courage, ungrateful devils showed a certain amount of graciousness, dirty dogs refrained temporarily from snapping at other people's bones. Even in the case of Sherwood who, Heaven knew, had lived under long years of suffering and a fanatical grievance, there were, Tony held, many plausible reasons for excuse. And so, being a confirmed optimist with a justifiable confidence in his winning smile, he preferred to believe in the integrity of Quex—but to keep the chart to himself. And having arrived at the conclusion went to sleep.

An hour or so later something—a perception of evil, a signal to the protective sense—brought Chrissie to instant conscienceness. Her eyes opened. Her ears strained for a sound. With a series of icy rivulets down her spine she remained motionless. There was Tony lying stretched and flaccid at her side. There was a great white splash of moonlight on the floor. There was the perpetual drumming of the sea. Then inch by inch the door opened. The floor creaked under a creeping step. A figure stepped over the puddle of light. The frock was canary yellow, the smarmy hair as black as ink. Framed in the shadowy doorway the looming unshapely body of the very friendly Quex.

A case was opened, found empty, closed. Another. Yet another. A tongue was clicked against the roof

of a mouth. There was a whispered direction, a hand was waved towards a cupboard. The stealthy opening of a door, the rustle of stirred clothing in patient and persistent search . . . Search ! That was the word. For what ? Dear God, what did this mean ? And then, at last, the quiet shutting of the cupboard, a brief interchange of whispers, a smothered oath, the snake-like withdrawal of the woman, another gleam of yellow, the merging of two figures—out. The inch by inch re-closing of the door.

And Chrissie sat bolt upright in bed. For a moment she felt as though she must utter a scream that could be heard not on the yacht but in Panton Street. Not on the yacht because this somehow seemed to fit in with the Sherwood scheme. In Panton Street because there in those two clean, normal rooms had been the cage-like safety of a home. "You little fool," she said in her head, "be brave. Control yourself. Say a prayer. Guard over Tony. Tony, oh my Tony !" And so, hardly breathing, she sat erect, fingers stretched, eyes distended, nostrils wide, mouth open . . . until outside, after an angry growl, a door banged, and after that nothing to disturb the rolling drum of sea.

Then she relaxed, bent over and kissed Tony on the lips. Not in the spirit of wifely or maternal love, of love's passion, but as a frightened child pleading to be held and hidden and warmed. Tony slept like a log. She kissed him again and then again with her arms about him, her trembling body close. And he smiled, murmured and returned her kiss—woke, and becoming aware of the trouble and the icy limbs turned with quick anxiety.

But before he could speak her hand was on his

mouth, that wonderful, small hand. "Sssh—whisper."

He whispered "What is it, Chris?"

With her mouth almost to his ear she told him and felt him go taut like a rope.

"The chart. The chart. They've got it. My God. I've lost it. The island's gone."

"The chart? Is that the thing they were after? Why?"

"To destroy my proofs. To do me out of my kingdom. Can't you see? At the very moment when I am needed most. You heard those screams."

And without a word she took his hand and guided it to her breast beneath her night gown.

A paper crinkled, and with a face against his face Tony felt the wrinkling of a nose.

"Oh God," he said. "Chris, you—you most amazing Chris. Where would I be without you?"

"There's no such place," she said.

VI

They began the first day on the island early. It was to be a very difficult day. All the more so because Tony was unarmed. . .

It had been decided in the whispered consultations of that stark awake night to assume no knowledge of the attempted burglary, to play the parts of two green bland people lately of an older civilization who suffered from the anaemic intellectualism of high sophistication which made them accept everything on its surface value in the usual civilized way. Thus they hoped to mislead the man Bill Quex into the

belief that they regarded him as a kind and thoughtful host who would do all that was in his power to help them with a view to being gratefully rewarded when the island changed hands.'

And so at six o'clock in the morning, believing that Quex would be in bed, they entered the sitting room with the intention of getting a spade from one of the native servants and with this to follow the directions of the chart to the place where old Lord Stirling had, in a moment of self-conscious romanticism, buried the vital deeds. By no means a bad idea.

They drew up short at the sight that met their eyes.

Not having been anywhere near his bed, there was Quex spread out in a drunken coma on his favourite wicker sofa that was drawn across the main entrance to the house. His jacket had been flung upon the floor where it was spread-eagled flatly. His dirty buttonless shirt was gaping, his thin hair tousled, his loose-lipped mouth wide open, one arm hanging like a broken bough. An empty whiskey bottle was lolling between his legs.

"That's awkward," said Tony quietly. "And there's netting over the windows."

Chrissie thought quickly. She was in her most practical mood.

"I'm glad he's sleeping so heavily," she said. "It's good. All we've got to do is to go back to our room, and before anybody sees us break the netting over that window and climb out of the cottage that way."

About to turn, they heard the click of the gate, saw a native race light-footed up the clinker path and wave something at them from behind the hideous barrier of flesh. There was a moment of indecision

before he held the letter like a card and spun it into the room, turning immediately with a sheepish smile and an obvious air of relief to make short work of the path, let himself out and disappeared.

A point of the envelope hit the wall, and as Quex stirred like an uneasy whale Tony picked it up from the floor, put his hand under Chrissie's elbow, urged her into their bedroom and shut the door.

"From the 'Isis'" he said. The yacht's pennant was engraved in colours on the flap of the envelope. "It feels like a chit from G.H.Q. dropped into a wood surrounded by the enemy." He laughed and ripped it open. And together they read a letter from Pollock written in a hand that always thought of printers.

"Aboard the S.Y. 'Isis.'"

"Three o'clock in the morning."

"My dear Tony."

"This letter, containing a dreadful piece of news, will be taken later on by Evans in the launch to your island and given by him to the first native that he can find to deliver to you at once. With this warning as to the reason of my writing I prefer to lead up to the thing itself with the elaboration of certain details which (once a journalist always a journalist) will give you a mental picture of what we have been through.

"Last night, during dinner in this fascinating bay, Sherwood was noticeably nervous and preoccupied. From the moment that we sat down to the moment that we went out to watch the lights of the town and the glow-worms among the fringe of trees he spoke only in answer to a direct question, and then like a man throwing an empty bottle out of the window of a

train. I mean that his brain seemed to be attached so completely to one line of concentration that he passed over questions as an express rattles over a bridge. Lady George gave him up as a bad job, Lumley respected his obvious desire to be left to himself with his invariable courtesy, and I said a few good things when the prattling Kitty had so large a mouthful that she was physically obliged to let me in. There are women, and she is one, who, either from a wish to show off or a childish excitement, choose that moment in which to say nothing as loudly as they can when they are seated with the sort of people from whom everyone desires to hear. Bridge was presently suggested—I think by me—and, always obliging, Lumley left the smoking room in order to find Sherwood and was gone some time. He returned to tell us that finally he had discovered our friend writing in the library, very pale and with the wound on his face a noticeable red. He declined, brusquely, to make a fourth then and later. And just as Lumley was moving gracefully away he looked up with a very peculiar smile, called out, ‘I’m damned sorry for you, Colonel. You’re a perfect wonder. Good-bye.’ This, I need hardly say, Lumley refrained from repeating in the presence of his wife. He told it to me when after an attack of hysterics Lady George had been persuaded to go to bed.

“And so we played cut-throat which is, as you have heard me say, beneath contempt. It was at exactly a quarter to twelve by the ship’s bells that a report echoed and re-echoed from the several hills. It was commented on by us with various unemotional conjectures and left at that. But five minutes later a bedroom steward rushed in excitedly upon us and

announced the bald fact that Mr. Sherwood had committed suicide. We sprang to our feet—poor Kitty upsetting her whiskey. Lumley and I proceeded at once to his cabin—reluctantly on my part as I am stomachically weak—and there, truly and tragically enough, was our very generous host. He had blown out his rather unusual brains.

“Pinned to the chest of his pyjamas was the enclosed sealed letter addressed, as you will see, to your sweet wife, and as there was written upon it ‘Send Evans at once with this to the island,’ I have carried out those orders, waiting only for a more reasonable hour than this is. I am greatly agitated, so are Lumley, the Captain, the stewards, and those of the officers whom we have seen. There was, of course, a sensation. The smoking room was the general meeting place where Kitty, as I think they say in America, ‘threw a fit,’ and blamed the unoffending Lumley in the usual way. To me, as to them, the act is unaccountable, but perhaps the letter to Mrs. Tony will shed some light. This, I warn you, must be preserved, and shown to the coroner if there is one here. The question that rises to my lips at this moment is ‘Who is going to pay the yacht’s expenses on her way back to Southampton?’

“Yours in grief, mystification and anxiety,
“MORTIMER POLLOCK.”

Damocles had fallen victim to his own sword.

For a moment neither spoke. With an unaffected gesture Tony removed his cap and with a wrinkled forehead sat gazing at the floor . . . Poor old Teddy. The man on whose sofa he had slept so often when he had been utterly without the price of a room ; whose

cigarettes he had smoked by the hundred, whose hospitality he had worn to shreds, who had introduced him to Chrissie, who had loved as fiercely as he had hated. The man who had never once, throughout the whole of the War, flinched from duty or wavered in his loyalty to his friend in charge . . .

And then Chrissie clasped her hands like a child and shut her eyes, and in a low voice said, "Oh God, be kind—be very kind to poor old Teddy who has not been well."

And after a little while, thinking back to that distant night when she herself had made every preparation to take the same short cut to death, had gone with this man to the Covent Garden Ball to dance up to the foot of the grave, and through him had met Tony, she opened the other letter and held it so that it could be read by her husband.

"Dear Chrissie,

"I am writing this to you during a few hours of cold and cruel sanity that may have been brought on by the astonishing beauty of this place to-night. I don't know. It was when I was standing alone on the deck before dinner, watching the sunset, that something went flick in my brain like the turning on of a strong light. In that I saw the futility and the feebleness of what I have been trying to do. Your words came back to me—'where he goes I go,' and I realized then, for the first time, your everlasting love for Tony and the fact that if he dies you will follow him. I haven't got a chance. And so, knowing that I shall be mad again to-morrow, I am going to take advantage of this respite to get out of both your ways, calmly, deliberately, and with deep apologies for

having worried you so much. Good-bye, Chrissie. God bless you, dear. And when you read this and know that you are free from the danger of my jealousy and passion, tell Tony to keep an eye on Quex. He's a bad man and means to stop at nothing to retain possession of the island. I will do what I can to help you both in spirit if I am to be given any sort of chance at last.

"Yours in death as in life,

"TEDDY SHERWOOD."

VII

The door of the bedroom was flung open. With the fumes of alcohol in his brain and a lust for blood in his eyes, there stood Bill Quex, mountainous, unwashed, evil.

"Nar then, come on art o' that," he said. "Spoofin's over. We've blinkin' well got ter see 'oo's the master 'erc."

"Good morning," said Tony coolly. "It so happens that we have something else to discuss at this moment. Be good enough to make yourself scarce, will you?"

The wind went out of the 'gross creature for a moment. God's truth, 'ere's a blinkin' bit of cheek. But it came back in a sufficient quantity to enable him to roar. "Y'ear'd wot I said. I ain't in no mood fer messin' abart terday. Jist git up and come on art and we can git ter business quick."

"I never conduct business before ten o'clock," said Tony. "You will let us have breakfast at once, please, and as soon after that as I feel like it I will

proceed to demonstrate to you who's the master here."

The astonishment on Bill Quex's ugly face was almost comic. "You'll be in abart eight bleedin' pieces in five minutes if yer don't do wot I tell yer, mer swanky London lad."

Tony got up slowly. "The ace of the German Flying Force dropping bombs on hospital" he said to himself. "This is where you nip in quick." And with all the Wing Commander that was in him he sprang at Quex and hit him in the jaw.

The benighted heathen reeled into the sitting room, but kept his feet; and as Tony followed him to land his left again, gave orders to half a dozen natives who went for Tony in a hurricane and had him down.

"You brute, you coward," cried Chrissie, and with the flaming courage of a mother tigress began to kick the brown bodies in the struggling mass.

With an iron grip upon her arm Quex hauled her away and held her.

"Now then, yer blinkin' toff, I'll tell yer somethin'," he shouted. "This 'ere island is mine, d'ye see, with all that's on it. I tell yer so and yer can take it from me that's right."

A heave, a readjustment of glistening bodies, a flying man's curse. "'You coward, you bully," a tightening grip, the everlasting booming of the sea, a loud guffaw.

The chart in Chrissie's stocking burned like a mustard plaster.

"Listen 'ere, Master Stirlin' blinkin' Fortescue. 'And over that chart like a nice young feller wiv a wise affection for yer bones and yer shall 'ave breakfast wiv kind old Uncle Bill and chat abart the weather.

Be a blinkin' fool, and go agin my authority, and you shall cough it up in the little room you object to where them screams come from last night. Take yer choice, cockie . . . It's all ther sime ter me."

"If you dare," said Chrissie, "I'll call on every white man in Apia to bring you to the law."

"You'll never get ter Apia, darlin,' you nor 'im. Especially you, wot'll save me the blinkin' trouble of lookin' fer a gal." He yanked her close and kissed her—ouch, that filthy mouth—hopped with pain at the vicious impact of a sharply pointed shoe and yelled out further orders in the lingo. Brown hands ran through Tony's pockets. Another heave, another settling, another breathless oath, the booming of the sea.

"Nothing? All right then, take a dose of my legal medicine and 'ave a jolly good time." He put his hand on the writhing Chrissie—God, now blue them eyes were, wot a fine little bit she was—stowed her under his massive arm, went to the door of his room for culprits and flung it open wide. "Altogether, boys," he said, proud of his ingenuity inside, and stood back with a grin.

"You dirty dog!" cried Tony, fighting like the very devil. By jove, these men of his were fit . . . But it was no use. They pinned his arms to his sides, twisted their sinewy legs round his legs, worked him jerk by jerk to the room and fell in a slithering brown cluster.

Whereupon Quex slammed the door and with a yell o' pain dropped Chrissie. She had bitten one of his fingers to the bone.

Rushing to the door and out into the sunlight, she cried "Help, help," until her voice broke like a

crushed bamboo and trailed away. "Oh God, oh God, help Tony, my Tony, in this trouble. Oh please, please."

No shrieks like those of the previous night came from that closet of torture, but a deep groan, and a long intake of breath through clenched teeth, again and yet again.

"That's the stuff that makes 'em in a nice soft mood. Go on, mer brawny boys. I'll give yer the tip to stop."

"Stop," cried Chrissie. "Stop. He hasn't got the paper."

"Oh, wot a naughty little liar, wiv them blue eyes too."

"I tell you he hasn't got it. *I have. I have.*"

"'Ere, wot d'yer take me for? Give a thing like that to a blinkin' woman? 'E ain't sich a silly ass as that."

Again those groans, and again. An oath and a scuttle of feet. The booming of the sea.

Chrissie flung herself on the floor with her arms round Quex's knees. "Have mercy and I'll give you the paper. I'll give you anything. I'll give you myself."

"Oh, the lovsy-dovsy. Oh dear me, wot a wheedler! I'll take yer when I want yer, darlin'. Bet yer life on that."

She couldn't stand it. It was awful. Tony, her beautiful Tony, being broken on the wheel . . . She threw herself at the door, hammered and hammered; ran about the room, distraught, agonizing; seized the whip with the loaded handle and tried to use it, and was pitched against the sofa, where she lay.

And all in front of the cottages there were heads—

more and more heads; odd cries and growing murmurs, the patter of running feet like heavy rain, the booming of the sea.

"Shove 'im art," cried Quex. "That's enough fer this time. 'E's agoin' ter be a good young feller nar."

It was Chrissie's scream that rent the sunshine as Tony, the immaculate Tony, was helped out of that primeval room. His face was grey, his forehead beaded with globules of pain, his clothes were torn and dishevelled, his left arm hung limp, broken at the shoulder. He swayed and tottered beneath his trembling legs. But he turned towards Chrissie and tried to cheer her with his winning smile.

("Didn't I say he was a bloomin' gent?")

"Ah, that's the way," said Quex. "'E's blinkin' well enjoyed 'isself. I said 'e would."

"You're . . . you're a very . . . charming person," gasped Tony, edging to the whip.

"No blinkin' error. Come, I like yer mood. Tell me where ter find ther paper, and me and ther missus'll tuck yer up in bed, make yer cosy wiv a tot o' whiskey and nurse yer like a couple o' 'arpin angels."

"It's . . . it's in my sock," said Tony. "Come and get it, déar old . . . Mr. Quex."

But *he* dipped first and with his right hand and last remaining strength snatched at the whip, and before Quex could back away or put his arms up, brought down the loaded end upon his bullet head with a most magnificent crash.

They fell together, the one insensible, the other in utter weakness and collapse.

And before Chrissie could stir a finger the six paid slaves of a brutal master lifted Tony to the sofa,

signalled to their fellow natives behind the wall of the garden, and fell upon the prostrate form of the man they so bitterly hated with loud and joyful cries.

In an instant the room was filled with dark brown bodies that swarmed upon the despot like birds of prey—plucking, rending, tearing and drowning the boom of the sea with long drawn yells of bliss . . .

VIII

Chrissie was sitting by the bed holding Tony's quivering hand. The doctor from Apia had made him comfortable and he was sleeping on his back.

The gate clicked again for the twentieth time that day. The chanting in the village never ceased. Someone wearing shoes entered the sitting room on tiptoe and opened the bedroom door. It was Pollock gleaming with perspiration, a martyr to mosquito bites. He raised his long forefinger and whispered "Can you come?"

Chrissie nodded, placed Tony's unbroken arm on the bed with the utmost tenderness, bent over his flaccid body for a moment in love and admiration, crept into the sitting room and closed the bedroom door.

"My dear," said Mortimer Pollock to the tiny devoted girl. "You look as though you'd been through an earthquake."

"It doesn't matter. Nothing matters," she answered. "Tony's alive."

"It's difficult to understand why. He must have the constitution of an ox. May I smoke?"

Chrissie's gesture of permission was not only

eloquent but humorous. To be asked such a civilized question after such a day . . . in that place.

He led her to the wicker sofa and sat with a sigh of relief. He could have grumbled about the heat. He dared not trust himself to speak about the insects. All the same he had put in a most unusual and exciting day, the incidents of which he would have held up to the most scathing ridicule if he had read of them in one of the current books.

"Well, I took the doctor back to Apia in the launch. A competent man. He will be here again to-morrow and onwards. He told me to say that he will have Tony on his legs by the end of the month. He understood the excellence of your nursing abilities and nerve when I informed him of the way in which you came by them. He will have a far more difficult job with Quex though, whom we took to the hospital in the most appalling mess."

As Chrissie put a hand over her eyes, celebrations in the village continued with undimmed enthusiasm. The tyrant's reign was over.

"Um," said Pollock. "If Evans and I hadn't come upon those ghastly rejoicings at that very minute your friend Quex would have been taken into the village like a picture puzzle. He was almost in pieces as it was. There would have been a memento in every adobe on the island. From your vivid description of the affair and that man's methods I can't help feeling sorry that we arrived in time. It was a pity to prevent these simple people from indulging in their very natural vengeance."

"Will he die?" asked Chrissie, who would have confessed to a similar sorrow if anyone had asked her.

"Probably not," said Pollock. "Have you never

noticed that those who are dear to the world fall out before their allotted time while the bad men in every walk of life, especially politics, go on in the very best of health to a ripe old age? I don't suppose that I shall ever have the doubtful pleasure of seeing Quex², because the Captain has decided to start on the return journey at the end of next week. It appears that the thoughtful Sherwood had left the necessary money in the purser's hands. But you will see him again I have no doubt. As soon as his various limbs have been reattracted to his extremely unpleasant trunk he'll come back to the island to demand the sight of the deeds."

"Yes, but by that time," said Chrissie "we shall have lodged them with the Consul and the island will be ours."

"You think so?"

"Yes, of course. Why not?"

Forgetting that he was so far away from 1922 Pollock looked about for an ash tray, and not finding such a thing imitated the code of manners of the younger generation with an easy flick. "Well," he said, "I don't know why, but certain sentences in old Lord Stirling's letter flashed into my mind just now. And, do you know, it occurred to me that having had his leg pulled so often by Tony in the past he might have retaliated by inventing those deeds by way of a most sardonic posthumous jibe."

Chrissie was too amazed to speak. She already had been through so much harrowing that day that this new suggestion of dire misfortune took her breath away.

"I never met Lord Stirling, but I've known a host of his fellow countrymen—Fleet Street reeks of

Harris tweed—and I can't forget that when a Scotsman makes up his mind to indulge in a joke it has a nasty sting."

• Panton Street lost, the Daimler given up, all that sea between them and London—Tony's plans of kingship—the mere idea of anything so cruel piled Pelion upon Ossa.

"You mustn't even hint such a thing to Tony," she said quickly . . . "but of course you never will."

"The only thing is this," said Pollock, "we sail, as I told you, at the end of next week. If there are no deeds and the island can be claimed legitimately by Quex, it will be well to discover that fact before we leave you, or how in the name of wonder will you both get back?"

"But you saw the chart that night in Mount Street," said Chrissie, "and you didn't think there was anything wrong with it then."

"That's perfectly true. I didn't. It was only this morning that I remembered what sort of relations existed between Tony and his father and that the old gentleman was a Scot. One of them had a joke with me once and put me into a gold mine in which I lost everything except the clothes that I was wearing at the time. I had been put over his head on my paper and he revenged himself like that. I have a great suspicion of Highland jocularities."

Chrissie got up and walked about. Here was a new twist in an affair which already had wound itself in and out of Sherwood's two attempts at murder, his suicide; and the awful business with Quex. She always had had the uncanny feeling that Paradise and trouble went hand in hand. The man who had given that name to the island must have omitted to

knock wood. Remembering the wild practical jokes that men had invented during the War and those which Tony himself had played, as he had told her, there was nothing impossible in Pollock's belated contention that the dead Lord Stirling was "putting one over" on Tony. Men of his class had a most peculiar sense of humour.

"I am sorry to have made you so uneasy," said Pollock, whose vocation in life it was, as a matter of fact, to do that very thing. "Suppose we use the chart now and see precisely what it leads to. It will save time and enable you to make your plans. I desire only to be helpful, Mrs. Tony," which wasn't wholly true. For two reasons he hoped that the chart was what he called a spoof; the first because he so disliked the Scotch and would be really delighted to find his estimate right; the second because there would be cut-throat on the return voyage if Tony remained behind. Like all men who had lived without a wife he had been able to bring selfishness to a fine art.

Chrissie shook her head. "No," she said. "Even if the 'Isis' sailed to-morrow I can't go digging now."

"Why not? Tony's asleep. There's certain to be a spade somewhere."

"I know; but, you see, the last thing Tony asked me before he went to sleep was to do nothing until he was on his feet. He said that he was going to make the 'Deed Day' a national day, a great ceremony before which the islanders should be told the whole romantic story, then attend the function in all their gala things and acknowledge their 'kind white king.' That's what he said, Mr. Pollock, and it means a lot to Tony."

"My God," said Pollock. "He may be asking for the most utter humiliation. I strongly advise that he has a private view of the deeds—or not, as the case may be. Looking at his condition, we shall have sailed before he is well enough to move. Exercise your judgment, my dear. Think of yourself this once. Act on your own responsibility. You needn't say a word."

But Chrissie stood her ground. Tony had always been a gentleman to her. She would do nothing behind his back. "No," she said. "No. It's Tony and me against the world."

Pollock shrugged his shoulders. "Just as you like," he said. "Very foolish. It's carrying loyalty a step too far. Suppose that the deeds *are* there? You can't tell me that Tony is really serious when he talks about 'king stuff,' going back to his age and metier, and all that. It's what we used to call blather at school, I take it—a form of self-deception, thoroughly realized, that is used with assumed enthusiasm for the purpose of a jaunt. Well, he's had his jaunt and now he can return to civilization. If I know Tony, he's the last man in the world to live on here. And as for you, little Londoner, as much a part of the old town as the Thames itself, I can't conceive of your remaining here as anything but a tourist."

Going to the bedroom door, Chrissie peeped in at the patient, satisfied herself that he was sleeping, went back to Pollock and looked up into his mosquito bitten face.

"You don't know me," she said quietly, "and you certainly don't know Tony."

"Well, but it's my job to study character and look through the keyhole of humanity's fourth walls."

"Then you haven't taken the trouble to look through Tony's. If you had during any hour of the day and night since that evening at Mount Street, you would have seen that his father's letter rang a bell in his heart, touched something in his spirit that had never been touched before not even by the War, which proved his mettle. It gave him the secret of his failure at Eton and Oxford, showed him why he was a waster; 'on the town,' as he called it; known to the police. He grasped at the fact that he was a throw-back as Uncle Alan said, born all those many years too late. His coming here has nothing to do with blather. To him it's a holy quest, Mr. Pollock, a romantic journey, a God-sent opportunity to begin all over again. Can't you understand that?"

"No," said he, "I can't."

"But it's true, it's true," she cried. "I tell you that it's true. That's why I let him bring me, put no obstacle in his way as I could have done so easily. If I hadn't seen it all through his eyes he would have gone on driving the Dainler because he's what I used to call a bloomin' gent. And as for me, I'm here because he's here. He'll stay here and so shall I. Never mind old London and the Thames. So long as he lives I shall live and when he's taken I shall follow. We made a compact, Mr. Pollock, and this is love."

There was a pause but not a silence. The booming and the chanting went on and on.

"Well," said Pollock. "I don't know who said originally that there was an exception to every rule, but he was right, I see, whoever he was." He raised Chrissie's hand to his lips with a deferential bow. "Mrs. Tony, your husband may or may not be a bloomin' gent, but without the slightest doubt you're

a perfect lady . . . But, oh good Heavens, these mosquito bites."

IX

At the cry of "All ashore that's goin' ashore," Lady George threw her arms round Chrissie's shoulders and burst into tears. Not because it was the thing to do on such occasions, and she always did the thing, but because her keen interest in the girl whom she had seen first dressed as a ballerina, had ripened into love and admiration. The poor old funny lady was very genuinely moved.

"Good-bye, my dear, my dear," she said. "God ~~only~~ knows what we're leavin' yer to. Cocoanut trees and lava-lava, the awful noise of the sea and them dammed insects anyone can 'ave; that's what I say. Give me 'ill Street with all the raspin' taxes. To think that you've got to live with all these things worries me."

Standing on tip-toes Chrissie kissed her, and succeeded in being brave. Practice makes perfect in that as in other things. "Good-bye, dear Lady George," she said. "Give my love to Leicester Square."

Lumley bore down, the epitome of tact and kindness, the greyhound who was very grey. He had been saying last words to Tony whose left arm was in a splint. "If all goes well with you, dear girl, as I feel quite sure it will," he said, "you may not see me again. I'm very old, you know. Therefore, from the bottom of my heart, I wish you all the happiness in the world."

Again she stood on tip-toes and received a fatherly kiss. She squeezed his hand very hard, being afraid to speak.

Then Mortimer Pollock came forward and led her to the companionway. "If anything goes wrong at the ceremony to-day," he said; ". . . no, I've not breathed a word of my suspicion to Tony—hurry across to Apia, send a wireless after the 'Isis,' and we'll turn round and take you home again. You promise me?"

"I promise," said Chrissie with a smile. She held out her hand and said "Good-bye."

He hesitated to take it. By jove, he liked this girl. Devotion, loyalty, gratitude, honesty, self-sacrifice, a heart of gold—she had them all. It was quite extraordinary. A revelation. It would make him less merciless and sarcastic—what an easy thing that was—whenever he thought of her. "Good-bye, then," he said, "you tiny big thing. But I can't forget that the old man was a Scotsman!"

She went down into the boat—the same old shabby boat in which Sherwood had seen Bill Quex gazing vindictively at the "Isis," as well he might have done. But for her arrival in those waters the poetic justice of his natives never would have come to pass. The yawl lay out in the bay.

The yacht's hooter, like a long drawn sigh, echoed from hill to hill.

"So long," said Tony, once again. "I'm going to build a wing on to the palace for your special use." Pale, thin and still a little shaky, his good left arm out of commission, he was careful of the steps.

Three times the hooter. Three times and three and three the echoes.

The native hauled at the oars. The "Isis" came to life.

Chrissie waved her hand. "Give my love to Panton Street . . . and good old Piccadilly Circus. . . ."

• "Trafalgar Square. . . ."

"And the Metropole."

"All right, all right."

Lady George could hardly see the old worn boat, the glistening native, her dear boy Tony and the girl he had taken from Teddy Sherwood at the ball before the War.

"Don't forget your promise," cried out Pollock.

Chrissie kissed her hand and wrinkled up her nose. If that cynic were right about Lord Stirling and the chart turned out to be a ghastly joke, she could nurse poor old Tony through an illness of the spirit as she had nursed him through his physical wreckage, and sing their way back to Panton Street.

As the "Isis" turned round slowly, Tony raised his hat and flashed the well-known winning smile.

"Now," he said to McCoustie, whose red-fringed eyes had followed the chart to a spot in the heart of the village, "before you begin to dig you must say these things to my people."

"Aye."

With Chrissie at his side, as she always was, and an expression of the deepest emotion in his usually smiling eyes, Tony looked slowly round at the flower-crowned natives who, in all the glory of their ancient finery, had formed an ecstatic ring. To the throb of the drum-logs, the hollow boom of the tom-toms, the lisp of the wind in the palm leaves, the perpetual roll of the sea, they were reeling and

surging in the dance-passion, singing their guttural chant.

Raising his hands for silence, when all sound died and every movement ceased, Tony turned again to McCoustie—"Tell them that from this moment the torture room is closed. Tell them that the day of unkindness will never come again. Tell them that the young white chief is here to dedicate his life to their well-being with sympathy for their needs. Tell them that under my kingship they shall be treated with brotherhood and understanding"—his voice broke—"and ask for their faith in me."

And McCoustie told them in their language and a mighty shout rang out.

"Now dig."

And as McCoustie stabbed the earth with the spade Chrissie, the courageous Chrissie, trembled like a leaf. "Oh God, dear God," she cried in her soul, "don't—don't let this be a cruel joke. Oh don't, for Tony's sake, who has come back through all these years to do his job."

The spade struck something with a metallic click. The earth was scattered, and in the shallow lay a small and rusty box. Stirling had been painted on it and some of the letters had been washed away. It was wired, there being no lock. And when this was wrenched off and the lid upraised, there, neatly, were the deeds of Paradise.

And as Tony waved them above his head and Chrissie gave thanks in prayer, the air filled once more with the noise of drum-beat, and tom-tom. The chant commenced again, and in all the colours of rainbow, coral, bird and fish the rejoicing natives

whirled and twisted in the dance passion. This was their day of days.

"And I'll do my damndest to live up to that creed," said Tony, "if you'll help me Chris."

Passing the site chosen mutually for their palace they returned to the house of Bill Quex. McCoustie had gone down to the jetty. They had the place to themselves.

"There's one other thing," said Tony, with something warm in his eyes. "There's your Bible in the bedroom Chris. Do you mind bringing it here?"

"Yes," she said, wondering. "Of course I will if you want it."

She came back with it quickly. What was he ~~was~~ going to do? She had rarely seen him with a book, and never with Sissie's Bible.

"I don't know whether a rather strange thing has ever occurred to you, duckie. But under these circumstances, you and I have got to be married again."

"Married again?"

"Of course. The old one was a morganatic affair, d'you see? However, we can make that right in the shake of a jiffy. Darling, put your hand on the Book."

And she did do, looking up. How blue her eyes were, how gold her hair and heart.

All along the high blue sky like a waving feather was the smoke of the out-of-sight "Isis," and there, all round them, the chanting and the tom-tom and the roar of the sea.

"Do you take King Tony to be your lawful husband?" he asked.

"I should think I do," she said.

"Do I take Queen Chrissie to be my wedded wife? You bet your life," he said.

And he placed the Book to her lips and to his lips and held out his one good arm. And she pressed close; with her chin no higher than his topmost waistcoat button, and adored. (Of course he was a bloomin' gent! A King, a Chieftain, a Wing Commander, a loyal and faithful husband, a sportsman and a lover.)

"Oh Chris, my wonderful Chris. What can I do for you?"

"You've done it all," she said wrinkling her nose. . . . "But I don't think I shall grumble if you do it all again."



